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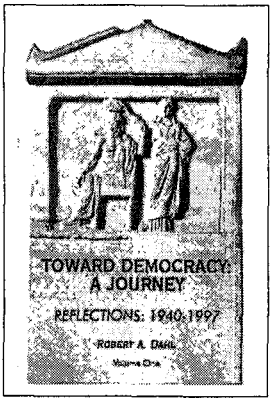

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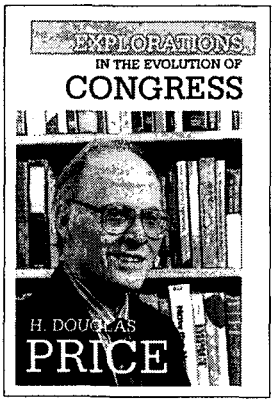

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Michael Allen Gillespie

THE THEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF MODERNITY

ABSTRACT: *Most critiques of modernity rest on an inadequate understanding of its complexity. Modernity should be seen in terms of the question that guides modern thought. This is the question of divine omnipotence that arises out of the nominalist destruction of Scholasticism. Humanism, Reformation Christianity, empiricsim, and rationalism are different responses to this question.*

The emergence of modern age out of the medieval world has typically been understood as the triumph of light over darkness or reason over superstition. There have been many different explanations of this transformation, some emphasizing the distinctiveness of modernity, others its continuity with the preceding age. Perhaps the most widely held view today sees the modern era as the product of exceptional human beings, of brilliant scientists, philosophers, writers, and explorers who overcame the superstitions of their age and established a new world founded on reason. Seen in this way, modernity is the creation of Leonardo, Machiavelli, Columbus, Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, Newton, and any number of other thinkers, acting individually or collectively. This search for a founding father or fathers understands modernity as the product of human will that overthrew the medieval world. Modernity is thus pictured as a radical break with the past.

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Michael Allen Gillespie is Professor of Political Science and Philosophy and director of the Gerst Program in Political, Economic, and Humanistic Studies at Duke University. He is the author of *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* and *Nihilism Before Nietzsche.*

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This vision of modernity was called into question in the earlier years of our century by scholars such as Etienne Gilson, who demonstrated that the supposed founders of the new age had in fact borrowed many of their essential ideas from their medieval predecessors (Gilson 1930; Koyré 1923). Neither they nor the age they "founded" was thus as original as they and their successors had maintained. Contemporary historians, often focusing on social history and the history of science, have tried to show that the transition from the medieval to the modern world was much more gradual than was hitherto believed. Indeed, when examined closely, these historians argue, there were many more similarities and continuities between the two epochs than the traditional view suggests (Funkenstein 1983).

In like vein, Karl Löwith argued in *Reason in History* that in many crucial respects modernity is the secularization of Christian ideals, and is thus not ultimately distinct from the Middle Ages. For example, Löwith views the notion of progress, which is so essential to the modern self-understanding, as the secularization of Christian millenialism. Understood in this way, the traditional account of the emergence of modernity as the triumph of reason over superstition is seriously flawed, blinding us to the continued existence of premodern irrationalism in the modern world.

The continuity thesis has been challenged in recent years by Hans Blumenberg (1996), who sees the modern age not as a secularized successor to the medieval world, but as something new and unique. However, he rejects the Kantian and Hegelian equation of modernity with reason in favor of the more Nietzschean view that identifies modernity with self-assertion. The self-assertion that characterizes the modern world, however, is not in his view merely a random will to power. Rather, it is directed at answering the question posed by the collapse of the medieval world. Modernity in this sense is the second overcoming of gnosticism, the doctrine that the cosmos is the creation of an evil spirit rather than of the transcendent God of salvation. A second overcoming is necessary because the first Christian attempt failed, leading to the destruction of Scholasticism by nominalism and the replacement of a God of reason by a God of will. In the wake of this failure, modernity attempted to establish a new ground in the notion of human self-assertion. Modernity in this sense is not a mere secularization of Christianity but something new and legitimate in its own right. Phenomena that look like secularized elements of the Christian view of the world are in fact only "reoccupations" of now-empty Christian positions, i.e.,

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attempts to answer outmoded Christian questions in modern ways. The idea of progress, from this point of view, is not a secularized form of Christian millennialism but rather the reoccupation of the medieval need to show God's hidden hand in all events. According to Blumenberg, the misperceived need to answer such now-meaningless questions has blurred our understanding of modernity and led us incorrectly to delegitimize the modern enterprise.

While all of these views of the origin of the modern world deserve more attention than I can give them here, I would like to present in brief compass another description of the origin of modern thought that draws upon these accounts but also goes beyond them in a variety of ways. Modernity, I want to suggest, arose not in opposition to the medieval world but out of its rubble. Superior or more powerful modern ideas thus did not drive out or overcome medieval ideas, as is often maintained; rather, they toppled the ruins of medieval ideas that had remained standing after the internecine struggle that brought the medieval world to an end. Modern "reason" was thus able to overcome medieval "superstition" and "dogma" only because these were fatally weakened by the destruction of the world in which they made sense.

The destruction of the medieval world, however, did not merely open up space for new ideas and a new way of life. It also presented humanity with a new and perplexing problem that has guided human thought in important ways ever since. Modernity came into being not in a vacuum, but in response to the particular crisis engendered by the collapse of the medieval world, and modernity can best be understood as a series of diverse answers to the profound question opened up by this crisis. No single principle defines the modern project. Modernity is not subjectivity or autonomy or technology or progress or representation or any other one thing, and the attempt to reduce modernity to any one of these fails to capture its richness and variety.[1] Modernity, however, is also not sheer diversity or a mere collection of arbitrary ideas. All of modernity's diverse moments are "essentially" related through the question they seek to answer. The question *as a question* defines the realm of possible answers and thus limits the possible diversity of modernity, but it does not determine which of these answers is correct. In order to come to terms with modernity, we thus need to come to terms with the modern question that lies at the threshold of modernity.

The medieval view of the world was a synthesis of Christianity and pagan philosophy, or, as it is more characteristically put, of reason and

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revelation. The grounds for this connection were already present in the origin and development of early Christianity in the Hellenistic world. After its adoption as the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity was even more thoroughly infused with and informed by Greek philosophy. However, the tension between revelation, with its emphasis on divine omnipotence and incarnation, on one hand, and philosophical rationalism and the notion of a rational cosmos, on the other, was not easily resolved, and remained a problem for Christianity throughout its long history. Indeed, one might argue that much, if not all, of Christian theology was made necessary by the continual and periodically deepening antagonism of these two moments.

Scholasticism was the greatest and most comprehensive theological attempt to resolve this tension. While there was considerable variety within Scholasticism, in its classic Thomist version it took the form of realism. Realism, as the Scholastics understood it, has little to do with realism as we understand it today. Scholastic realism was a belief in the extramental existence of universals. Drawing heavily upon Neoplatonism and a one-sided reading of Aristotle, Scholastic realists argued that universals such as species and genera were the ultimately real things, and that individual beings were merely moments or expressions of one of these universals. Moreover, these universals were nothing other than divine reason made known to man either by illumination, as Augustine had suggested, or through the investigation of nature, as Aquinas and others argued. Within this realist ontology, nature and logic reflected one another. Nature could consequently be described by a syllogistic logic that defined the rational structure of the relationships of all species to one another.

While God transcended his creation, he was reflected in it and by analogy could be understood through it. Thus, logic and natural theology could supplement or, in the opinion of some, even replace revelation. For similar reasons, man did not need Scripture to inform him of his earthly moral and political duties. He was a natural being with a natural end and was governed by the laws of nature. Scripture, of course, was necessary in order to understand everything that transcended nature, but earthly life could be better grasped philosophically.

For all of its magnificence, the cathedral of Scholastic thought depended on the delicate counterbalancing of Christian belief and pagan rationalism, and it was the instability of this relationship that brought it down. This balance was threatened both by the growing influence of reason and secularism within the Church, which fostered a falling away

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from Christian practices, and by the ever-recurring and ever-more-strident demands for a more original Christianity, based solely on revelation or, even more radically, on a simple *imitatio Christi* that elevated Christ's example above Scripture itself. The preservation of medieval Christianity depended upon a reconciliation of these two powerful and opposing impulses. Such a synthesis, however, could only be maintained in theory by the creation of an ever-more-elaborate theology and, in practice, by the ever-increasing use of papal power.

The immediate cause of the dispute that shattered this synthesis was the growth of Aristotelianism both within and outside of the Church. The increasing interest in Aristotle was in part an inevitable consequence of the growth of Scholasticism itself, but it was decisively accelerated by the reintroduction of many Aristotelian texts to Christian Europe through the commentaries of the great Islamic philosophers Avicenna and Averroës. The most visible manifestation of this new interest in Aristotle was the development, by a new kind of secular Christian intellectual, of an independent system of philosophy alongside theology (Encandela 1986, 82–83). This development was viewed with deep suspicion by the pious defenders of a more "original" Christianity, not merely because of the pagan roots of the new Aristotelianism but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of its connection to Islam. Paganism was a known and tolerable evil; Islam, by contrast, was an ominous theological and political threat.

The Church moved to restrain this movement by hierarchical fiat. Aristotelianism was condemned in 1277 by Bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, and by Robert Kilwardby at Oxford (Grant 1982, 537–39). The position that was staked out in the Condemnation of 1277 laid great emphasis on omnipotence as the cardinal characteristic of God, and in the succeeding years, this notion of omnipotent freedom came to constitute the core of a new notion of God. This new God was largely the creation of William of Ockham and the nominalist movement his thought engendered.

The Nominalist Revolution

Drawing upon the work of earlier protonominalist thinkers such as Roscelin and Abelard, and the work of Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus, William of Ockham and his followers radically transformed Scholastic metaphysics and theology. Faith, Ockham argues, teaches us

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that God is omnipotent and thus that he can do everything that is logically possible, i.e., everything that is not contradictory. Every being exists only as a result of God's willing it, and exists as it does only because he so wills it. Creation is thus an act of sheer grace and is comprehensible only through revelation. God creates the world and continues to act within it, bound neither by its laws nor by his own previous determinations. He acts simply and solely as he pleases and, as Ockham often repeats, he is no man's debtor. There is thus no immutable order of nature or reason that man can understand and no knowledge of God except through revelation. This rejection of the synthesis of reason and revelation was the beginning of the end of the medieval world.

Ockham's notion of divine omnipotence meant the end of realism. God, Ockham argued, could not create universals because he would thereby constrain his omnipotence. Every being was thus radically individual, a unique creation of God himself, called forth out of nothing by his infinite power and sustained by that power alone. To be sure, God might employ secondary causes to produce or sustain some entity, but they were not necessary and were not ultimately responsible for the creation of the entity in question.

The only necessary being is God himself. All other beings are contingent creations of his will.[2] They are neither implied by, nor are they the presupposition of, anything else. Ontological individualism undermines not only realism but also syllogistic logic and science, for in the absence of real universals, names become no more than signs or signs of signs. Language thus does not reveal being but conceals the truth by fostering a belief in universals. In fact, all universals are merely second- or higher-order signs that we, as finite beings, use to aggregate individual entities into categories. These categories, however, do not denote real things. They are only useful fictions that help us make sense out of the radically individualized world. They also, however, distort reality. Thus, the guiding principle of nominalist logic is Ockham's famous razor: do not multiply universals needlessly. Every generalization takes us one more step away from the real, so the fewer we employ, the closer we remain to the truth.

Since each individual being is contingent upon God's free will, there can be no knowledge of created beings prior to investigation. We thus cannot understand nature without an investigation of natural phenomena themselves. Syllogism is replaced by hypothesis as the foundation of science. And we can never move beyond hypothesis, for God is free in the fullest sense, i.e., free even from his previous determinations. He can

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overturn anything he has established, interrupt any chain of causes. There is thus no absolute necessity except the omnipotence of God's will. God, for example, did not have to send us his son in the form of a man; the savior might have been a donkey or a rock (Ockham 1957, 44).

In defending such a radical notion of omnipotence, Ockham and his followers came very close to denying the truth of revelation. They sought to avoid this disastrous conclusion by distinguishing between God's *potentia absoluta* and his *potentia ordinata*, between his absolute and his ordained power, between what God could do and what he ordained that he would do. This distinction, however, was difficult to maintain because God was under no obligation to keep his promises or to act consistently. Indeed, for the nominalists God is indifferent, i.e., he recognizes no natural or rational standards of good and evil that guide or constrain his will. What is good is good not in itself but simply because he wills it. Thus, while God today may save the saints and damn the sinners, tomorrow he might do the reverse, recreating the world from its very beginning if necessary. Ockham, however, was a reliabilist and did not believe that this was likely, but he insisted that such a possibility could not be dismissed without denying God's divinity. Many of Ockham's later followers were less dedicated to this reliablist position.

In the nominalist view, there is very little we can know of God and his intentions beyond what he reveals to us. Natural theology, for example, can prove God's existence, infinity, and supremacy but it cannot even demonstrate, for example, that God is one. Such a radical rejection of Scholastic theology clearly grew out of a deep distrust not merely of Aristotle and his Islamic interpreters but of philosophic reason itself. In this sense, one of Ockham's goals was to strengthen the role of revelation in Christian life.

Ockham's rejection of Scholastic logic and theology was mirrored in his rejection of the Scholastic understanding of nature. Nature, for Scholasticism, is governed by an overarching teleology in which divine purposes are realized. A particular entity becomes what, in a sense, it already is as a moment of its species. Motion in this sense is naturally ordered toward the good. The nominalist rejection of universals, however, was a rejection not merely of formal but of final causes. Thus, nature does not direct man to the good. Viewed from a more positive perspective, man is not determined by nature or reason and there is no natural law that constrains human life. On the most fundamental level, man is free.

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That man is free in this sense does not mean that he is free from the moral law. Indeed, morality is important precisely because there is no natural law giving direction to human life. Our obligation to the moral law does not arise out of a utilitarian calculation about salvation, but out of gratitude. We owe our existence solely and simply to God. We are eternally in his debt. God, however, owes nothing to us and in no sense reacts to us. He has already given us the gift of life and to some few will give eternal life, but he is neither just nor unjust in his choice since his giving is solely an act of grace.[3]

As this short sketch makes clear, the God that nominalism defines is no longer the beneficent and predictable God of Scholasticism. He is not susceptible to human influence or control and acts simply out of freedom. He is indifferent to the consequences of his acts. He lays down rules for our conduct but he may change them at any moment. Some are saved and some are damned but there is only an accidental relation between salvation and saintliness, or damnation and sin. The world this God creates is a radical chaos of utterly diverse things in which we can find no point of certainty or security.

From our contemporary perspective, it is difficult to see how one could love or find solace in such an unsettling God. It is perhaps no accident that the idea of this God originated among the Franciscans, who stood at the opposite extreme on the theological spectrum from the Aristotelians. During the period in question, theirs was the preeminent voice calling for a more original or "primitive" Christianity that took its bearings not from the philosophical ideas of the Greeks and the corrupt political structures of the Roman state, but from the example of Christ. Christian life, they argued, was not to be found in papal palaces and clerical power but in poverty and asceticism. The most radical Franciscans found even revelation insufficient and believed that one could only approach God through a literal *imitatio Christi*. They were not alone on this path. Earlier "primitivist" movements within (and at times against) the Church included the Cathari, Waldenses, and Humiliati. Francis, however, spoke for all of these radicals when he argued that to be a Christian one must walk with God, retracing the *via dolorosa*. Only in this way could one appreciate the meaning of the incarnation and God's love for man. Francis enshrined this dedication to suffering in his famous Rule, which imposed austerity and poverty upon his followers.

After the death of its founder, the Franciscan order was split between zealots who demanded strict obedience to the Rule and moderates

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who sought a papal dispensation from its more extreme strictures. In the face of the broad appeal of the Franciscans among the common people and the consequent threat they represented to the well-heeled clerical hierarchy, Pope John XXII granted the moderates their dispensation while condemning and hunting down the most zealous Franciscans, the so-called Fraticelli. He did not stop there. Drawn into a dispute with the Franciscan order and its governor general over the issue of poverty (the so-called Poverty Dispute), he ultimately condemned the Franciscan belief in the moral superiority of the ascetic life, arguing that this contradicted Scripture.

Without entering into the theological merits of this dispute, it is clear that the pope recognized not only the threat to his power within the Church but also the radical transformation of Christianity that the Franciscan vision entailed. Man, as Francis understood him, is not by nature an exalted being. His joy comes not from his place or his possessions in the world but from his nearness to God. Taken to its extreme, such a doctrine is not merely an attack on priestly wealth and power, it is also an attack on all clerical (and political) hierarchy.

One of the leading spokesmen for the Franciscan side in this debate was William of Ockham. The pope based his argument against the superiority of poverty on Scripture, i.e., on God's *potentia ordinata*. The Franciscans by contrast rested their case on God's *potentia absoluta*. When the Pope declared that there was no difference between the two, Ockham and the Franciscans were horrified. They saw this as the revival of Abelard's heretical position that God is bound for all eternity by his previous will to save some specific souls. God, they argued, is not bound in this or any other way save the principle of noncontradiction; he is free and sovereign at every moment. To deny this fact was to deny God. They consequently proclaimed the pope a heretic.

In this sense, nominalism was Franciscan theology. It destroyed the order of the world that Scholasticism had imagined mediates between God and man, replacing it with a chaos of radically individual beings. However, it united each of these beings directly with God. Thus, from the Franciscan point of view, life seems chaotic only to those who do not see the unity of creation in God. For those, such as Francis, who share in this mystical unity, all other beings are their brothers, since all animate and inanimate beings are equally the creatures of God.

While the most zealous Franciscans were constrained by moderates within the order and by the Inquisition, the efforts of the Church to suppress nominalism as a whole were a manifest failure. Although Ock-

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ham's thought was censured in 1326 and repeatedly condemned from 1339 to 1347, his influence continued to grow. Indeed, during the 150 years after his death, nominalism became one of the most powerful intellectual movements in Europe. There was a strong Ockhamist tradition in England under the leadership of Thomas Bradwardine, the archbishop of Canterbury, and later under Robert Holcot and Adam Woodham. The Ockhamists were equally strong in Paris under the leadership of Nicholas of Autrecourt and John of Mirecourt. Spain remained an exception, but the influence of nominalist thought grew to such an extent in other European countries that by the time of Luther there was only one university in Germany that was not dominated by the nominalists.

Nominalism sought to tear the rationalistic veil from the face of God. It revealed a capricious God, fearsome in his power, unknowable, unpredictable, unconstrained by nature and reason, and indifferent to good and evil. This vision turned the order of nature into a random collection of individual beings and the order of logic into a mere concatenation of names. Man was dethroned from his exalted place in the natural order of things and cast adrift in an infinite cosmos with no natural law to guide him and no certain path to salvation. It is not surprising that for all but the most extreme ascetics and mystics, the dark God of nominalism proved to be a profound source of anxiety and insecurity.

While the influence of this new vision of God derived much of its force from the power of the idea of omnipotence itself, the concrete conditions of life in the latter half of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries played an essential role in its success. During this period, three momentous events—the Black Death, the Papal Schism, and the Hundred Years War—shook the foundations of medieval civilization. While the nominalist vision of God might have been regarded by most as an absurdity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the tumult and horror of the succeeding period helped make such a God believable.

The Middle Ages end with the triumph of the nominalist vision of God. The Scholastic enterprise, of course, was not simply abandoned. It was repeatedly revived in a number of forms, but never with the same global aspirations. Even Francisco Suarez, Aquinas's greatest defender and the last great Scholastic, was at heart a nominalist. On one level, he supported Thomistic realism, arguing for the extramental existence of universals, but at a deeper level he twisted this argument in a nominalistic fashion, asserting that every individual being was a universal. The world in which modernity came to be was thus not the world of Scholasticism but the world of Scholasticism overturned. This collapse

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did not occur all at once or in a short space of time, but it was well underway by the end of the fourteenth century.

Renaissance Humanism

As Ockham and Pope John XXII were fighting the final theological battle of the Middle Ages in the simple cells and papal palaces of Avignon, a young Florentine with a great love of old books was preparing himself a few miles away for a lifelong project that would help to define the new age. This student was the young Petrarch, whose exiled father, a lawyer, had come to Avignon in 1313 seeking employment in the papal bureaucracy. We do not know how closely he followed the debate between Ockham and the Pope, but he must have been aware of at least its general outlines. He had taken ecclesiastical orders in 1326 and was supported by the powerful and influential Colonna family, whose affairs were deeply entangled with those of the pope and the clerical hierarchy. Given these connections and concerns, it seems likely that Petrarch was intimately acquainted with the Poverty Dispute and the theological positions of both sides.

Like Ockham, Petrarch rejected Scholasticism. He and most of the humanists who followed him were convinced of the nominalist contention that God could not be philosophically comprehended. As Francesco Guicciardini (1965, 64) put it, God's "ways are so past finding out, that they are rightly called *abyssus multa*." The humanists saw Scholasticism not as a coherent body of wisdom but rather as a collection of thousands of insane ideas (Guicciardini 1965, 72–73)—much as it appears to many modern thinkers. As Erasmus put it, Scholasticism is "higher lunacy" (Flynn 1983, 5).

Petrarch, and humanism generally, grew up in the intellectual space created by the nominalist destruction of Scholasticism. Like the nominalists, the humanists hoped to renew Christianity. Petrarch, for example, was clearly aware of the corruption of the Church, but he was also convinced of the essential goodness of Christianity. His model for Christian renewal, however, was not the Gospels or Franciscan asceticism but the Hellenized Christianity of the ancient world. What was necessary was thus not an *imitatio Christi* but an encounter with the Bible in its original languages and classical context. Such an approach to Scripture, he felt, would make it possible to wipe away the centuries-old accretions of meaning that had corrupted Christianity. This was a

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vast project that involved not only learning the original languages but also publishing the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible, as well as the supporting historical, philosophic, and literary texts of the ancient world. It occupied the humanists for two centuries and was (they believed) one of their crowning achievements. The sixteenth-century French humanist Loys le Roy (1944) was typical in claiming that the theology that had been destroyed by Scholasticism had been successfully rejuvenated by the humanist retrieval of the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew.

The humanists' concern with the ancient world was not confined to religious texts and practices. They also sought to retrieve and popularize the works of pagan authors. The retrieval of these ancient works gave rise to an admiration and emulation of pagan models. In sharp contrast to the ascetic element in late medieval Christianity so evident in the Franciscans, the love of honor and beauty again became preeminent human motives as a result of the humanists' activities. While humanism remained generally Christian, it thus envisioned a new kind of man with new virtues.

The humanist's model for this new man was ostensibly the great-souled man of antiquity. Profound differences, however, separated the humanists from the ancients. The foremost of these was the notion of individuality that was so central to humanist thinking. This notion of individuality is vibrantly portrayed in such works as Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier* and *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, each of which describes a man who is a world unto himself. The heroes of Machiavelli's *Prince*—Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus—are similarly independent men, fatherless and forced from birth to depend upon themselves. The preeminent literary example of humanist individualism is Montaigne, who claims to have created himself in and through his *Essays*, a work he refers to in the preface as "the book of the self." The ideal for the Greek artist and citizen, in contrast, was not the formation of individual character or personality but assimilation to a universal ideal. Renaissance humanism does not put the human per se at the center of the world but the *individual* human being, and in this respect it owes a deeper debt to nominalism than to the ancients.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's famous account, "The Dignity of Man," makes this debt to nominalism clear. He writes,

> Finally, the Great Artisan ordained that man, to whom He could give nothing belonging only to himself, should share in common whatever

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> properties had been peculiar to each of the other creatures. He received man, therefore, as a creature of undetermined nature, and placing him in the middle of the universe, said this to him: "Neither an established place, nor a form belonging to you alone, nor any special function have We given to you, O Adam, and for this reason that you may have and possess, according to your desire and judgment, whatever place, whatever form, and whatever functions you shall desire. The nature of other creatures, which has been determined, is confined within the bounds prescribed by Us. You, who are confined by no limits, shall determine for yourself your own nature, in accordance with your own free will, in whose hand I have placed you. I have set you at the center of the world, so that from there you may more easily survey whatever is in the world. We have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal not immortal, so that, more freely and more honorably the molder and maker of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever form you shall prefer. You shall be able to descend among the lower forms of being which are brute beasts; you shall be able to lie reborn out of the judgment of your own soul into the higher beings, which are divine.". . . To him it was granted to have what he chooses, to be what he wills. . . . And if, content with the lot of no created being, he withdraws into the center of his own oneness, his spirit, made one with God in the solitary darkness of the Father, which is above all things, will surpass all things. (Ross and McLaughlin 1953, 477–79)

Pico's man has no specific nature. He is not the rational animal standing at the peak of creation. He has no natural form or end. Like Ockham, Pico believes that man is characterized by his free will. The humanists' understanding of free will, however, differs in one decisive respect from the will that Ockham and nominalism attribute to man. It is not only a created will but a self-creating one. God grants man the capacity to will, and man then makes himself into what he wants to be. This notion of a self-willing being has clear affinities to the model of the nominalist God. Like the God who creates him, this man is an artisan, but an artisan whose greatest work of art is himself. This man is a maker, a poet in the most literal sense, able to identify with every being and make himself into any one of them. But man is not constrained to be finite; he can emulate and become one with God himself, because as a willing being he already in some sense *is* God. Such a oneness with God, however, is a retreat into darkness, a retreat from the world and the power in it. While Pico holds open the possibility of a quasi-divinity for man, it is a divinity of stillness and withdrawal, not of creative omnipotence.

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This limitation on man is set by the world he inhabits—the nominalist chaos of motion that, by its very capriciousness, limits the power of individuals to achieve mastery (Trinkhaus 1992, 187–98). Art can give form to things; through it man can paint pictures, shape marble, build palaces, and even create states, but fortune will eventually bring all to ruin.[4] Thus, even the greatest of princes, Machiavelli argues, will be able to master fortune only half the time. While man is a free being and in some sense already divine, he is not omnipotent, for as a finite being he has both a childhood and a dotage in which he is dependent upon others, and a death that inevitably brings his rule to an end.

This humanist idea of fortune reflects an underlying notion of time as degeneration, as antagonistic to form, as corrosive. Form and purpose do not inhere in nature but are the products of an artistic will that builds dikes against the floods of fortune—dikes, however, that fortune ultimately overflows. The humanists' pessimism about the capacity of art to master nature was reflected in their understanding of their own place in time. They knew that the magnificent world of the ancients that they so admired had perished and been superseded by a dark, Gothic age. They hoped to establish a new golden age but they never imagined it would last forever or dreamed that it might be successively improved for all eternity.

Humanism grows out of nominalism and offers a solution to many of the problems posed by divine omnipotence. This solution is itself constructed on nominalist grounds, i.e., on the understanding of man as a willing being, although it is only successful because it vastly narrows the ontological difference that nominalism put between man and God. The consequent vision of the superior individual, towering, as Shakespeare's Cassius puts it, over his fellows like a colossus, was thus something distinctively new and a clear step beyond the Middle Ages.[5] This vision played an important role in the development of modernity, particularly in the formation of the later notions of subjectivity and autonomy. It would, however, be a mistake to believe that this notion of individuality was simply superseded and sublated by these later concepts. It remains a continuing if less obvious strain of modernity.

The Reformation

Humanism sought to answer the problem posed by divine omnipotence by imagining a new kind of human being who could secure him-

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self in the chaotic world nominalism had posited, which the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries themselves had seemed to embody. This movement drew upon antiquity but was also deeply and decisively indebted to the nominalist revolution in thought. The second major attempt to come to terms with the problem of the nominalist God was the Lutheran Reformation. It too grew out of nominalism, but followed a much different path than Renaissance humanism, not away from God toward man but from man back to God.

The Reformation was not simply or even primarily a response to the problem posed by nominalism and the idea of divine omnipotence. It was rather an effort to reform the Church and eliminate the abuses that had crept into its practices over many years. Such a reformation had been demanded from various quarters for over two centuries. The papal schism had played an important role in making the defects of the Church visible, but that problem paled beside the increasingly mercenary and corrupt practices of the clerical hierarchy itself, portrayed so explicitly by Boccaccio and other humanist authors. The Poverty Dispute in an indirect way turned on this issue as did, more directly, Savonarola's rebellion in Florence. Luther's rebellion against the Church was also clearly a reaction to corruption within the Church. All of these factors notwithstanding, I want to suggest that the particular form that the Reformation took was determined on a deeper spiritual level by the problem of the nominalist God, and that this idea of God played a decisive role both in framing the issues of the Reformation and in shaping its results.

The Reformation has often been described as the last great upsurge of medieval religion. While this interpretation is certainly true in some sense, it fails to recognize the astonishing extent to which Reformation Christianity, at least as developed by Luther, rejects medieval Christianity on essentially nominalist grounds. Like Ockham, Luther was an Augustinian. His attachment to Ockham, however, goes well beyond this superficial affiliation. Before taking monastic orders, Luther studied at the University of Erfuhrt with Trutvetter and Ulsingen, who were both nominalists and followers of Ockham. Under their influence, Luther himself became an enthusiastic adherent of Ockhamism (Meier 1950, 56–67; Vignaux 1935; Courtenay 1974, 58). He asserted that Ockham was his master and referred to the Ockhamists as his sect. From his earliest acquaintance with nominalism, however, Luther was troubled by the impenetrability of the God nominalism described and tormented by the resulting uncertainty of his own salvation (Bainton 1950, 169).

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Indeed, he joined the monastic order of Augustinian Eremites in Erfuhrt in hope of finding relief from this doubt.

The education and training he received as a member of this order, however, did little to quell his inner uncertainty. This course of study was also deeply nominalist. He studied the Bible, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the works of Ockham and of his disciples D'Ailly and Biel, as well as the work of St. Bernard, Duns Scotus, and Augustine. These theological studies hardly comforted him. Indeed, this further nominalist training, with its emphasis on divine omnipotence and indifference, only served to magnify Luther's spiritual disquiet. His concern with personal salvation could not be stilled by a God who was unstillness itself, who today might save the saints and damn the sinners but tomorrow do exactly the reverse.

Luther's personal quest for the certainty of salvation would be of little interest to us if it had not become intertwined with his struggle against corruption in the Church. In the context of this movement of reform, the spiritual questions that dominated Luther's personal life and the answers he found to them became decisive elements of European intellectual development.

The corruption of the Church was bound up in Luther's mind with the sale of indulgences. The justification for indulgences was the notion that punishment for sins could be remitted as a consequence of good works. In the Christian context, however, this notion skirted very close to the heretical doctrine that one could earn salvation. In principle, the Church claimed only that an indulgence remitted earthly punishment. Moreover, the Church also required a demonstration of sincere repentance from the sinner. The legitimacy of this practice, however, was weakened by the substitution of cash contributions to the Church for actual works, and by the suggestion of those who sold the indulgences that they freed sinners not only from punishment in this life but also in the next world. It was thus possible to obtain indulgences even for those who were already dead. In practice, the doctrine of indulgences was consequently little more than a vehicle for turning sin and repentance into gold.

Luther and many others detested this practice and regarded it as proof of the corruption of the Church. Luther agreed wholeheartedly with his Ockhamist teachers that God was no man's debtor. Consequently, he was convinced that no priest or pope could accept payment on God's behalf, since, as he stated in the 95 Theses, God alone can remit sin. Luther, however, disagreed not merely with the sale of indul-

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gences but with the notion that works of any sort can gain remission of sin.

Luther rejected the doctrine of works on nominalistic grounds. The idea that good works can bring about the remission of sin rests upon the notion that it is not the intention or will behind the action but the action itself and its real ends in the world that count. Sin in this sense has principally to do with consequences. In a world that looks primarily to consequences, it is possible to construct a calculus in which good works can counterbalance evil ones, regardless of how they are attained or whether they are produced by piety or merely by the desire to avoid damnation. However, if what is preeminent in God and by extension in man is the will, then sins can be remitted only through right willing, regardless of the result. Indeed, the right consequence is acceptable only as the result of a right will. "Good works," Luther (1960, 297) argues, "do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works."

While Luther rejects the redemptive power of works on nominalist grounds, he does not accept the nominalist/Franciscan alternative of asceticism and salvation by grace alone. It was precisely this alternative that so tormented him. Luther's answer to the question of indulgences thus is also his answer to the problem of the nominalist God. "Faith alone saves." Only willing rightly can guarantee salvation.

Luther's answer to the problem of salvation grows out of the nominalist notion of man as a willing being but transfigures this notion by reconfiguring the relationship of divine and human will. Faith, according to Luther, is the will to union with God, the love of God (1960, 277). This love evokes from a gracious God love in return. Human beings in this sense enter into a marriage with Christ in which Christ takes the sins of the lover upon himself (1960, 268–87). Through faith, one is thus liberated from sin. The marriage of God and man is based upon complete trust, for "when the soul firmly trusts to God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous" (ibid., 284). The faith or trust that Luther refers to here is trust in Scripture, for "faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the word of God" (ibid., 280). Faith in Scripture, in other words, guarantees salvation.

At first glance, it is difficult to see how Scripture solves the problem that nominalism posed, since reliance on Scripture seems to rest on the supremacy of God's ordained power, which nominalism explicitly denied. The nominalists argued that God is not bound by his own revealed will. Luther's elevation of Scripture transforms this doctrine.

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Scripture for Luther is not simply an objective text, but the individual experience that occurs in the encounter with the text.[6] The text is the word of God, and in and through Scripture God speaks directly to man. Faith arises from an inner certainty or illumination that comes about in the experience of this voice of God, in the personal relationship it establishes between the individual and God. There is thus no need for a priestly intermediary to interpret God's word. Indeed, the priest actually cuts one off from the word of God, putting himself and the dogma of the Church between God and man. There is and can be no dogma, "no fixed rules for the interpretation of the word of God, since the word of God, which teaches freedom in all other matters, must not be bound" (Luther 1960, 274). God does not need to be explained; he can speak for himself and does speak for himself to everyone who listens. All believers in this sense can be priests, if only the word of God is available to them in a language they can understand (Luther 1960, 289). Hence, the Bible must be translated into the vernacular and made available to all.

The word of God properly experienced thus guides and constrains human will. The importance of this fact is made clear in Luther's famous refusal to recant at the Diet at Worms. Luther argues:

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by an evident reason—for I confide neither in the pope nor in a council alone, since it is certain that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am held fast by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience is taken captive by God's Word, and I neither can nor will revoke anything seeing that it is not safe or right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen. (Rogge 1971, 100–101)

Man can will rightly only when he is taken prisoner by God's word, i.e., only when he is directed by God's will, when his will is God's will. Right willing, however, is the source of true freedom. Thus, the subjection of the human will to the divine will liberates the Christian from all other bonds. "A Christian," Luther (1960, 277) thus concludes, "is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."

The notion of God acting in and through us is the basis for Luther's transformation of nominalism. Luther describes the insight that made this transformation possible. Having long been troubled by the justice of God referred to in Romans, Luther determined to work through the text again to see whether he had properly understood the passage that

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caused him so much suffering. In rereading the passage, he had a profound spiritual insight. The "justice of God" did not refer to something abstract and distant, to an attribute of a transcendent God such as nominalism had imagined, but to God's justification of us. Similarly, "the power of God" referred to that by which God makes us powerful, and "his wisdom" to that by which he makes us wise (Luther 1967, 6:421–28). In this way, Luther was able to transform the abstract and distant God of nominalism into an inward power that suffused individual human beings. The faith that arises from the encounter with God's word in Scripture thus works in us and transforms us. Through it we are reborn in God because God comes to dwell in us (Luther 1854, 63:124–25).

Ockham proclaimed the individuality of every being as a unique creation of God but saw in the ontological difference between God and man an impenetrable barrier to human understanding and an insuperable barrier to the human will. Only through Scripture could one know God and what God wants from us, but even Scripture reveals only the momentary determination of a distant God's will, which might at any instant be otherwise. Luther too sees God as a *deus absconditus* who cannot be philosophically analyzed or understood. He too turns to Scripture as the sole source of guidance. In contrast to the nominalists, however, he maintains that the ontological difference between God and man is not complete, that there can be a kind of correspondence between God's will and our own not at a rational but at an affective level, a marriage of the spirit that can give us certainty of salvation and banish all doubts. Unlike the humanists, however, Ockham believes that this is not because man wills as God wills, freely and creatively, but is instead because man wills *what* God wills, because he is the agent of divine will. Man does not become a demigod but becomes the dwelling place of God; God becomes the interior and guiding principle of his life, or what Luther typically calls conscience.

Neither the humanists nor the reformers saw themselves as founding a revolutionary new age. Both in fact saw their projects as efforts of retrieval or renewal. Thus, neither movement understood itself as initiating or participating in a distinctively modern project. However, as we have seen, both Renaissance humanism and Reformation theology represent new and distinct modes of thought that arose in response to the same fundamental question. It would also be a mistake to believe that they are simply replaced by or embodied in succeeding forms of modern thought. While the humanist focus on self-willing individuality and

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Luther's idea of the God within play an important role in later intellectual developments, they cannot simply be reduced to subjectivity or autonomy, even if subjectivity and autonomy as we understand them are inconceivable without these previous developments.[7] In response to the challenge posed by the nominalist God, both humanism and Reformation theology hold up a new image of man and of God. Neither, however, focuses on the order or disorder of creation itself. It was this question that Bacon, Galileo, Hobbes, and Descartes addressed, and it was as a result of their investigations that modernity became conscious of itself as something distinctively new.

The Arrival of Modernity

Modernity proper begins with the scientific project that aims at making man master and possessor of nature. This project, as Hans Blumenberg and Amos Funkenstein have shown in great detail, is deeply indebted to nominalism in many different and important ways. I will not repeat their arguments here, but I will briefly try to summarize the general character of nominalist influence.

As we saw above, nominalism destroys the ontological ground of medieval science by positing an unpredictable world of radically individual and thus radically different beings. Indeed, from the nominalist point of view, the world itself is only a higher-order sign, an aid to the understanding that does not correspond to any reality. Nominalism thus seems to make science impossible. In fact, however, modern science develops as the result of a reconsideration of the meaning of nominalist ontology.

Scholastic metaphysics understood God as the highest being and creation as a rational order of beings stretching up to God. From the nominalist perspective, however, such an order is untenable not only because each being is radically individual but also, and perhaps more importantly, because God himself is not a being in the same sense as all created beings. While Ockham points to this gulf between God and his creation, he does not extensively explore it. This task was undertaken by another thinker whose path crossed Ockham's in Avignon, the German mystic Meister Eckhart.

Eckhart was deeply influenced by Neoplatonism, although his Neoplatonism was transfigured by his mysticism. Like Ockham, Eckhart saw an infinite distance between God and the world. From the perspective

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of the beings we encounter in everyday life, God thus seems to be nothing. In Eckhart's view, however, this issue must be examined from a divine rather than a human perspective, not logically but mystically. From the divine perspective, it is not God but the beings of the world that are nothing, or at least they are nothing without God. Since, however, these beings in some sense "are," they must "be" God, i.e., God must be "in" beings in some way. Without him, they would be pure nothingness. The infinite difference between God and his creation, however, means that God cannot be in things as their whatness or essence. God, Eckhart suggests, is in them in a different sense, as their *how*, the operative force that determines their becoming. In nominalistic terms, God is pure willing, pure activity, or pure power, and the world in its becoming is divine will; it is thus God. Or in more modern terms, the world is the ceaseless motion that is determined by divine will, which is nothing other than efficient or mechanical causality. The world is the incarnation, the body of God, and he is in the world as the soul is in the body, omnipresent as the motive principle.[8]

Creation is thus not simply disorder. God is in the world in a new and different sense than Scholasticism and traditional metaphysics imagined. He is not the ultimate whatness or quiddity of all beings but their howness or becoming. To discover the divinely ordered character of the world, then, it is necessary to investigate becoming, which is to say that it is necessary to discover the laws governing the motion of all beings. Theology and natural science in this sense are one and the same.

Empiricism and rationalism both work within this general understanding of the relationship of God to his creation but they differ considerably in their understanding of the meaning of this relationship. Rationalism, for the most part, understands the identification of God and his creation pantheistically. The motion of nature is the motion of God, and nature's laws are the forms and structures of divine will. Rationalist science thus is theologically grounded not in Scripture, but in the deduction of the laws of motion from transcendental freedom.

Empiricism, by contrast, understands the meaning of the identification of God and creation atheistically.[9] To say that Ockham's God is in everything, as Eckhart (and later Nicholas of Cusa) suggested, is to say that everything is sheer willfulness, motion without purpose or end, and without any necessary regularity. Viewed in this manner, there is no effective difference between the nominalist cosmos and a godless universe of matter in motion. The existence or nonexistence of God is irrelevant, since he can neither intensify nor diminish the chaos of radical

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individuality that characterizes existence. So science does not need to take God or Scripture into account in its efforts to come to terms with the natural world; it can rely instead on experience alone. "Atheistic" empiricism in this sense has its origin in nominalist theology. Empiricism, it is true, also draws upon ancient atomism and Epicureanism, but both of these are received and understood within an essentially nominalist vision of the world.

The rationalist and empiricist views of change as a manifestation of divine will provide the ontological foundation for the self-consciousness of modernity. Since Plato, being had been understood as timeless, unchanging presence. Change was always a falling away from being, degeneration. Nominalism called this notion into question with its assertion that God himself was not only subject to change but was perhaps even change itself. The changeable cosmos was no longer seen as inherently imperfect, and change could hardly be derided as degeneration. While this new view of becoming was never entirely spelled out and was constantly troubling to modern thinkers who strove repeatedly to discover an unchanging "ontological" ground of becoming, it was a crucial step away from both ancient and medieval notions of time and change.

If change is not simply degeneration, then some change may be progressive. Change guided by an enlightened human will may produce some good. In this way progress is opened up as a human possibility. The ability of the will to master the world was already clear to Renaissance humanists such as Machiavelli, but their reliance on *individual* prowess and intelligence made a thorough mastery of nature inconceivable to them. Human finitude meant that even the greatest individuals would inevitably succumb to all-conquering time. Mastering nature would require something more than merely individual will. Early modern thinkers saw science not as an individual accomplishment but as a broadly based social or political enterprise, embodying a human will of unlimited longevity that might finally master the natural world.

We can see the profound influence of nominalism on early modern science in the thought of Francis Bacon, often characterized as the father of empiricism. Like his nominalist predecessors, Bacon rejects realism both in its Scholastic and in its classical form. He agrees with the nominalists that "in nature nothing really exists besides individual bodies, performing pure individual acts" (Bacon 1960, 122). Accordingly, the universe is a labyrinth that is impenetrable to unaided human reason (ibid., 12).

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Previous thinkers, in Bacon's view, did not make any progress through this labyrinth because they did not use the powers available to them to attain this end, relying instead on mere observation and overhasty generalization (1960, 3). Bacon describes the various reasons for this ineptitude in great detail in *The New Organon* in his famous discussion of the four idols or false notions that have become rooted in the mind (ibid., 47–66). Humans have come to believe that all they need to know comes from their immediate experience, making them unwilling or unable to verify their generalizations by the examination of particulars. They have been content to guess rather than know and have put the dreams of the imagination in place of real knowledge (ibid., 23, 29). Even in his own time, when realism had been called into question, Bacon believed that men were still deterred from such an investigation by an undue reverence for antiquity and by the belief that scientific progress was impossible because of the obscurity of nature, the shortness of life, the deceitfulness of the senses, the weakness of the judgment, the difficulty of experiment, and the like (ibid., 80–90). What is needed, he argued, is a total reconstruction of science, the arts, and human knowledge on a proper foundation (1960, 4).

The knowledge that Bacon sought differs profoundly from that of Scholasticism. He was not concerned with what nature is and what it tends toward, i.e., with the formal or final cause of things, but with the particular character and motion of matter, i.e., with material and efficient causality. His goal was not theory or speculation but the betterment of the human condition (1960, 23, 78, 118, 267). Knowledge of how nature works rather than what it is will allow us to make it produce things that are useful to human life; when we understand the properties of particulars, we will be able to bring them together in ways that will achieve the effects we desire. This requires a model of nature not as a static system of categories but as a dynamic whole, as the interacting operation of all of particulars (ibid., 5, 132).[10] To understand nature in this way is to comprehend nature as power.

Although this power can carry humanity to hitherto unimaginable heights, it can only be gained by first lowering oneself, subordinating oneself to nature and limiting the exercise of one's own will. To master and command nature, it is necessary first to be its servant and interpreter. For Bacon, the goal of science is thus not the mere

> felicity of speculation, but the real business and fortunes of the human race, and all power of operation. For man is but the servant and inter-

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> preter of nature: what he does and what he knows is only what he has observed of nature's order in fact or in thought; beyond this he knows nothing and can do nothing. For the chain of causes cannot by any force be loosened or broken, nor can nature be commanded except by being obeyed. And so these twin objects, human Knowledge and human Power, do really meet in one; and it is from ignorance of causes that operation fails. (Bacon 1960, 29; see also 39)

The presupposition of such scientific knowledge is the humiliation of the human spirit, since success depends upon abandoning our proud belief that we occupy a superior place in the order of creation. Instead of acting as lords of creation, we must become apprentices in nature's workshop (ibid., 13, 66, 119). We do not need great wit or individual excellence, but dogged persistence and obedience to the surest rules and demonstrations (ibid., 6, 112).

While humility gains us entrance to the study of nature, cruelty is the means by which we reach our end. Mere experience will take us only into nature's outer courts. To reach its inner chambers, we must tear it to pieces, constraining, vexing, dissecting, and torturing it to force it to reveal the secret entrances to its treasure chambers (Bacon 1960, 20, 22, 25, 95, 113). Only as merciless servants who bind and torture their master to learn the source of his power can we win from nature the knowledge of its hidden forces and operation. On the basis of this knowledge, we can then produce "a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and miseries of humanity" (ibid., 23).

Bacon thus offers a new and revolutionary answer to the problem posed by nominalism and the nominalist God. He confronts and accepts the nominalist vision of the world and attempts to find a solution to its fundamental problems. He seeks neither a poetic transfiguration of this world nor a new covenant with its God. Instead, he strives to discover the hidden powers by which it moves in order to gain mastery over it. For Bacon as for Ockham and Machiavelli, man is a willing being who seeks to secure himself in the world. In contrast to both Franciscan asceticism and the humanist notion of godlike individuality, however, Bacon imagines man to be a relatively weak and fearful being who can succeed only by consistently working with his fellow human beings over many years to learn nature's laws and turn this knowledge to human use. The democratic character of Bacon's project makes its success conceivable. It does not depend upon the exercise of great and

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thus rare genius, but upon the consistent application of ordinary intelligence to a series of small problems that can be easily solved. Bacon in this sense differs considerably from his humanist predecessors. The hero of knowledge Bacon imagines in his *New Atlantis*, for example, is not a sparkling "great-souled man," but a solemn, priestlike, and ultimately nerdy scientist who is willing to investigate not merely the beautiful and noble but the low and foul, for he knows, like Bacon, that "whatever deserves to exist deserves also to be known" (1960, 109).

While Bacon laid the first bricks of the new science on a nominalistic foundation, it was Galileo, Hobbes, and Descartes who raised its walls. Bacon's method, in fact, was ill suited to the comprehension of nature understood as matter in motion. Its unmitigated nominalistic focus on individual beings and its inductive method rendered it incapable of grasping motion as such. Galileo's transposition of motion into the abstract world of geometry and his new understanding of inertia were crucial steps that made modern mathematical science possible (Spragens 1973, 60–74). On this foundation, Hobbes and Descartes developed alternative visions of the modern scientific enterprise.

Modernity and Freedom

The differences between Hobbes and Descartes are crucial and central to the bifurcation of modernity. One strain of modern thought begins with Bacon and includes Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Mill, and many contemporary Anglo-American thinkers. A second tendency begins with Descartes and includes Leibniz, Malebranche, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and most of the contemporary Continental philosophers. These two traditions of thought represent alternative answers to the fundamental problem posed by the nominalist God within the framework of the notion of modern science. The differences between them turn on a number of issues, but the question of the place and nature of the self is of central importance.[11]

For Bacon, man is a part of nature. Thus, he "can do so much and so much only as he has observed in fact or in thought of the course of nature. Beyond this he neither knows anything nor can do anything" (1960, 39). As a natural being, man is subject to all the constraints of nature, even though he can ameliorate his condition and, in a limited sense, master the natural world. We see a similar and fuller account of the limits of human nature in Hobbes, for whom man is also a piece of

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nature—a particular body in motion. As with the nominalists, for Hobbes natural motion is not teleologically ordered but disordered, attracted to no end, merely pushed by collisions with other individual objects. Man is moved not by his free will or by divine inspiration but by an infinite succession of causal motions. According to the law of inertia that governs all matter in motion, each human body will remain moving unless its motion is contravened by collision with another body. Such a collision is conflict and war. In a densely packed world, the natural state of man is a state of war. The purpose of science, as Hobbes understands it, is to organize the motion of both human and nonhuman bodies to maximize the unimpeded motion of human beings—what Hobbes understands as their freedom.

I do not claim that Hobbes's political theory follows from his physics; I want only to note the severe constraints that Hobbes imposes on the human will. Hobbes (1961, 127) seems at times to deny the human capacity for free willing altogether, characterizing will as simply the last appetite before action. For Hobbes as for Bacon, human life is lived within nature and is always constrained by the natural world. Man is more a creature than a creator, more governed by laws than law-giving. He is not a transcendent being who might imagine himself a god, but an impelled object whose chief desire is to continue on his prescribed course with the least interference from others.

The limitations that Hobbes places upon human freedom and will are characteristic of the empirical tradition. This relatively "low" vision of man has evoked the disdain of many thinkers, from Descartes to Fichte and Nietzsche, who have seen it as an ignoble and banal vision of human possibilities. It is difficult to deny this characterization. Yet the "banal" vision of man has constrained moral and political millenialism in undeniable and valuable ways. In eschewing the view from the heights, it has also avoided plunging into the abyss. The same cannot be said for the other strain of modern thought, whose representative figure is Descartes.

Descartes, too, was deeply influenced by the problem of the nominalist God, but his solution to this problem was different in decisive respects from that of empiricism. In particular, he has a radically different notion of man's position with respect to both God and nature than Bacon and Hobbes. In his early thought, Descartes was convinced that he could construct an apodictic science on the basis of mathematics. Such a science, he believed, could represent all motion in thought so that human beings could truly master nature, ameliorating human mis-

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ery, as Bacon had hoped, or producing the commodious life Hobbes desired, but actually making man the immortal lord of all creation (Descartes 1985, 1:143).[12] This initial project, spelled out in the unpublished *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, was called into question by Descartes's realization that the idea of a truly omnipotent God undermined the certainty of mathematics. This realization led to the spiritual quest that ended with Descartes' articulation of his famous principle, *cogito ergo sum,* as the foundation for all human knowledge.[13] The scientific project as Descartes lays it out in his mature thought is thus a clear response to the problem posed by nominalism.

What distinguishes the Cartesian solution to this problem from that of Bacon and Hobbes is evident in Descartes's fundamental principle, which grounds all of modern science on an autonomous subject who not only transcends nature but is also able to resist and ultimately replace God. For Descartes, man becomes master and possessor of nature by taking it away from its current owner. This is possible because man already is God, or at least is the same infinite will that constitutes God (Descartes 1985, 2:40, 134; Descartes 1957–68, 2:628; 4:332; Wilson 1986, 350).

The Cartesian notion of science thus rests upon a new notion of man as a willing being, modeled on the omnipotent God of nominalism, and able like him to master nature through the exercise of his infinite will. Descartes draws here not merely upon nominalism but upon the humanist ideal of a self-creating and self-sufficient individuality that he found in Machiavelli and Montaigne, and upon the Counter-Reformation conjunction of the human and divine will that arose in response to the similar notion in Luther. It is this potent combination that gives rise to the notion of subjectivity that plays a central role in rationalism, idealism, and later Continental thought as well.

Insofar as Descartes both leaves man within nature as a body in motion and elevates him above it into a quasi-omnipotence, he lays the groundwork for an inevitable and irremediable dissatisfaction that poses tremendous moral and political dangers for modern man. The infinite human will constantly strives to master and transcend its embodiment but is itself at the same time always bodily. In striving to realize its infinite essence, it is always constrained to negate the finite. However idealistic and noble its aspirations, this strain of modern thought repeatedly produces a millennial politics of extreme discipline and dissatisfaction that is constantly frustrated in its ambitions and must always reach for ever-more-extreme means of control to achieve its ends.

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In coming to terms with modernity, there has been a great temptation to identify modernity as a whole with one or another of the principal strains of modern thought, to deride it as petty and mundane because of the often-banal aspirations of empiricism and liberalism, or to reject it as a political nightmare because of the frequent fanaticism of its rationalism, idealism, and existentialism. Modernity, however, cannot be simply supported or rejected on either of these grounds, because it is not any one thing but a variety of traditions often quite at odds with one another. Each of these philosophical systems can be understood only in terms of the question it seeks to answer. Without the careful consideration of the profound theological questions that stand at the gateway to modernity and that continue to direct modernity's much more secular thinking in scarcely recognized ways, we will be unable to understand modernity or the lives we moderns have come to live and the politics in which we participate.

NOTES

1. It is particularly disappointing that many postmodernist thinkers who decry the demonization of the other and stress diversity and multiplicity have been so prone to define modernity monologically as subjectivity.
2. In a technical sense, each of the things God chooses to bring into existence already has a nature. The natures of these things, however, are individual rather than universal. Moreover, they are infinite in number and chosen freely by divine will. They thus do not in any real sense constrain omnipotence, except insofar as they exclude the impossible, i.e. the logically contradictory.
3. As severe as this position might seem, it actually ameliorates the Thomistic doctrine of original sin, since Ockham believes that no man intrinsically deserves damnation.
4. For a discussion of the Renaissance vision of the state as an art work, see Funkenstein 1986, 342.
5. It was already apparent to Heinz Heimsoeth (1994, 31) in 1922 that there was a clear connection between the early Renaissance and Ockham. This connection has become increasingly clear, especially in the history of science. See, for example, Koyré 1957; Crombie 1953; and of course Blumenberg 1983 and Funkenstein 1986.
6. Luther insists here on the necessity of Scripture and rejects the extreme subjectivism of the evangelicals, who followed not the word of God but the illumination they received in direct communion with God, their so-called inner light.

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7. Stephen Toulmin (1990) has argued that modernity has two roots, one in the Renaissance and the other in the seventeenth century.
8. Heimsoeth (1994, 47) has argued that in this sense Eckhart represents the first step toward the affirmation of creation.
9. I do not mean to assert in this way that all early modern empiricists are atheists. I mean only to assert that in their interpretation of nature it is irrelevant whether God does or does not exist.
10. Funkenstein (11986, 297) argues that this is the beginning of a new ideal of knowing as construction.
11. The initial gulf between these two strains of thought is perhaps most immediately apparent in Hobbes's objections to Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and in Descartes's replies (Descartes 1985, 2:121–37). There is, of course, a growing interpenetration of these two strains of thought in later modernity.
12. This project finds its preeminent form in the development of the calculus by Leibniz and Newton.
13. I have developed this argument more fully in Gillespie 1995, 1–14, 28–63.

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James Schmidt

LIBERALISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

ABSTRACT: *The eighteenth-century controversy among Moses Mendelssohn, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and Immanuel Kant undermines the tendency to equate liberalism with the Enlightenment. While the defender of the Enlightenment, Mendelssohn, championed defended such traditional liberal values as religious toleration, his arguments were often illiberal. In contrast, many of the views of his anti-Establishment opponent, Jacobi, are remarkably liberal. Kant's essays from the mid-1780s advanced a liberal conception of politics but a view of Enlightenment that was quite distant from those of both Mendelssohn and Jacobi.*

Liberalism is frequently viewed as a child of the Enlightenment.[1] Some of the more important figures in the liberal tradition, such as Locke and Kant, have played significant roles in the Enlightenment, while others, such as John Stuart Mill and John Rawls, have built their theories on the basis of principles first elaborated during the Enlightenment. And typically, both liberalism and the Enlightenment have been seen as emphasizing the protection of individual rights over the more ambitious aim of achieving the human good. Indeed, both tend to be uneasy with talk of "the good," advising tolerance of diverging conceptions of the ultimate purpose of life. Both traditions also tend to focus on the individual rather than the collectivity, both normatively and empirically.

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James Schmidt is Professor of Political Science and Sociology, University Professors Program, Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, telephone (617) 353-4020. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Lisbeth Haakonssen, gifted scholar, dedicated teacher, and friend of the Enlightenment.

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Thus, there are good reasons for supposing that those who regard the development of liberalism and the spread of Enlightenment as "aspects of one and the same current of thought and practice" (Gray 1986, 16) are not entirely misguided.

The identification of liberalism and the Enlightenment is not, however, quite as straightforward as it first appears. While it may be the case that leading figures of the English Enlightenment (assuming, for the purposes of argument, that we can speak of such a thing as an English Enlightenment)[2] also played a major role in the history of liberalism, it is not at all clear that this relationship holds everywhere else. Eighteenth-century Prussia offers one counterexample worth examining. In Berlin during the last quarter of that century, a wide-ranging debate on the nature and limits of enlightenment raged in the pages of scholarly and popular journals (see Schmidt 1996). One particularly fierce sideline of this more general controversy was the dispute between Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn over Jacobi's claim that Mendelssohn's friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had, shortly before his death, revealed to Jacobi that he was a "Spinozist." In the debate that followed—which came to be known, somewhat misleadingly, as the "Pantheism Dispute"—Mendelssohn defended the Enlightenment against Jacobi's criticisms.[3] Yet Mendelssohn, even when he was advocating such traditional liberal values as religious toleration, argued in ways that are difficult to square with our understanding of liberalism, while Jacobi, the critic of the Enlightenment, took many conventionally liberal positions.

In what follows I will first discuss Mendelssohn's defense of the idea of enlightenment and his arguments in favor of religious toleration. I will then examine Jacobi's critique of the Enlightenment in both its philosophical and its political dimensions. I will conclude with a suggestion about the tension between rationalist and critical strains within the Enlightenment and its significance for the relationship between liberalism and the Enlightenment.

Mendelssohn's Defense of Enlightenment and Religious Liberty

In December 1783 the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* published an article by the theologian and educational reformer Johann Friedrich Zöllner that, in a footnote, posed the question "What is enlightenment?" (Hinske and Albrecht 1990, 115). Zöllner's question launched a debate that, over the next decade, would fill the pages of German literary journals and moral

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weeklies. While Immanuel Kant's answer to the question in the December 1784 issue of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* is by far the most famous, it was not the first response to the question published by that journal. Three months earlier the journal had published an article on Zöllner's question by the great German-Jewish man of letters Moses Mendelssohn.

The question that appeared in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* had been under discussion for several months in the Berlin Wednesday Society, a secret society of "Friends of Enlightenment" closely linked to the journal. Its members included Zöllner and Mendelssohn.[4] While Kant's response was written without knowledge of the extensive discussions of the question within the Wednesday Society, Mendelssohn's essay represented, in part, an effort to summarize the debate about the nature, the advisability, and the possible limits of enlightenment that occupied the distinguished group of civil servants, clergy, and men of letters who made up the club.[5]

It is difficult to classify the members of the Wednesday Society as liberals.[6] Some, such as the jurists Karl Gottlieb Svarez and Ernst Ferdinand Klein, were members of the Prussian bureaucracy who, committed to the reforms initiated by Frederick the Great, accepted the idea that it was the duty of the state to undertake measures that would further the common well-being of its citizens, and viewed as legitimate the police powers that the state exercised over the material and spiritual lives of its citizens in pursuit of this goal (see Raeff 1975). Meanwhile, the clerical members of the Wednesday Society, all of whom embraced enlightened views on the relationship between reason and religion, expressed no qualms about the integration of their churches into the bureaucracy. Johann Joachim Spalding, Johann Samuel Diterich, William Abraham Teller were members of the Upper Consistory [*Oberkonsistorium*], the chief governing body of the Lutheran Church. Established as a part of the Prussian bureaucracy in 1750, the Upper Consistory was responsible for the appointment and supervision of clergy, the instruction of theological students, and the approval of candidates for teaching positions at the Lutheran seminaries.[7] Karl Franz von Irwing and Friedrich Gedike, also members of the Wednesday Society, were lay members of the Upper Consistory.

There were members of the Wednesday Society who had no ties to the Prussian bureaucracy, including the writer and publisher Friedrich Nicolai, the philosopher and dramatist Johann Jacob Engel, and Mendelssohn. But even those who were not directly connected with

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the bureaucracy appear to have had few, if any, reservations about the program of reform absolutism. Indeed, the Wednesday Society itself testified to the shared assumptions that brought together: reformist elements within the state bureaucracy engaged in the process of modernizing and rationalizing the legal code; enlightened clergy whose interpretation of Christian doctrine emphasized civic and social responsibilities; and philosophers who, in company with publicists, sought to transmit useful knowledge to a new reading public. For the members of the Wednesday Society, the state and the churches administered by it were potential instruments for social improvement, not barriers to reform—a situation far different from that faced by the French *philosophes*.[8] The Berliners' attempts to enlighten the citizenry presupposed a state with the authority to intervene in people's lives to a degree that would be anathema to liberal theorists.

Mendelssohn's article represented an attempt to pull together the various strains of the discussion of enlightenment that predated the appearance of Zöllner's article.[9] To this end, Mendelssohn focused on the relationship of the term "enlightenment" to two other related concepts: "culture" (*Kultur*) and "education" (*Bildung*). All three terms, he argued, denoted "modifications of social life, the consequences of the industry and the efforts of men to better their social conditions" (Mendelssohn 1996, 53). The most fundamental of the three terms, *Bildung*, defies easy translation: it can be rendered as "culture," "education," "formation," or "development." Mendelssohn distinguished two aspects of *Bildung*. *Aufklärung* refers to the "theoretical" side of the process of *Bildung*, involving a "rational reflection on the things of human life." *Kultur*, in contrast, is concerned with "practical" matters, with "goodness, refinement, and beauty in handmade arts and social mores" (ibid.). Summarizing the distinction for a friend shortly after the publication of his essay, Mendelssohn (1977, 237) wrote that "*Enlightenment* is concerned with the theoretical, with knowledge, with the elimination of prejudices; *Culture* is concerned with morality, sociality, art, with doing and not doing."[10]

Mendelssohn's distinction between *Aufklärung*, *Kultur*, and *Bildung* echoed a distinction he had made a year earlier in *Jerusalem*, his treatise on religious toleration. Where his response to Zöllner subdivided *Bildung* into *Kultur* and *Aufklärung*, *Jerusalem* subdivided *Bildung* into "government" (*Regierung*) and "education" (*Erziehung*). Government concerns itself with the actions of members of society and seeks to direct them towards the common good by providing them with "reasons that

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motivate the will" (*Bewegungsgründe*). Education seeks to instill in people the convictions that motivate actions that serve the common good by offering "reasons that persuade by their truth" (*Wahrheitsgründe*) (Mendelssohn 1983, 40). Despite the difference in terminology between Mendelssohn's article in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* and his discussion in *Jerusalem*, the parallels are not difficult to see. "Enlightenment" and "education" attempt to shape convictions by examining the truth or falsehood of the underlying beliefs. "Culture" and "government" seek to influence actions by providing incentives and disincentives that motivate the will.

At first glance, both Mendelssohn's understanding of enlightenment and his account of the relationship between church and state would appear to adhere to well-worn conventions in liberal thought. Like Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, a work he knew and admired, Mendelssohn distinguishes "external" actions from "internal" convictions, and he is concerned to confine the use of the coercive powers of the state to controlling the former. While legislation, with its system of rewards and punishments, can serve as an appropriate means for the motivation of the will, Mendelssohn, like Locke, thought it folly to assume that convictions could be coerced through laws establishing oaths of religious conformity. Locke and Mendelssohn part company, though, over Locke's attempt to distinguish "the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other." Locke defined civil government as "a Society of Men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own Civil Interests," and he listed as "civil interests" "life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like." He explicitly denied that the state was concerned with the "the Salvation of Souls," which was the proper concern of the church—"a voluntary society of men, joining together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God, in such manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the Salvation of their Souls" (Locke 1983, 28).

Mendelssohn's dissent from Locke moved on two levels. First, where Locke granted churches the right to expel members who dissented from their religious principles (with the proviso that excommunication could carry no civil penalties), Mendelssohn resisted the idea of granting even this much coercive power to religion:

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> Civil society, viewed as a moral person, can have the *right of coercion*, and, in fact, has actually obtained this right through the social contract. Religious society lays no claim to the *right of coercion*, and cannot obtain it by any possible contract. The *state* possesses *perfect*, the *church* only *imperfect* rights. (Mendelssohn 1983, 45)

While the state had the power to order and to coerce, religion has only power of "love and beneficence." "The only rights possessed by the church," Mendelssohn (1983 59–60) insisted, "are to admonish, to instruct, to fortify, and to comfort; and the duties of the citizens toward the church are an *attentive ear* and a *willing heart*."

Second, Mendelssohn questioned the exclusively secular focus of Locke's understanding of "civil things." For Mendelssohn (1983, 42), the best form of government was one that "achieves its purposes by morals and convictions . . . by education [*Erziehung*]." Hence, "one of the state's principal efforts must be to govern men through morals and convictions." Since laws cannot create convictions, and rewards and punishments cannot produce principles or refine morals, the only means the state has for influencing the morals and the convictions of its citizens is "persuasion" (*Ueberzeugung*).

> It is here that religion should come to the aid of the state, and the church should become a pillar of civil felicity. It is the business of the church to convince people, in the most emphatic manner, of the truth of noble principles and convictions; to show them that duties toward men are also duties toward God, the violation of which is in itself the greatest misery . . . ; that serving the state is true service of God, law [*Recht*] and justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] are commandments of God, and charity is his most sacred will; and that true knowledge of the Creator cannot leave behind in the soul any hatred for men. (Mendelssohn 43; omission in translation corrected.)

Circumstances such as the growth of population or the emergence of cultural differences may force the state to rely increasingly on externally binding coercive laws, but Mendelssohn holds that these must be seen as secondary remedies, used by the state when it cannot achieve its ends in tandem with religion by shaping the convictions and morality of the population.

Mendelssohn explicitly rejected Locke's restriction of "civil interests" to the "temporal welfare" of the individual. It is, Mendelssohn (1983, 39) argued,

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> neither in keeping with the truth nor advantageous to man's welfare to sever the temporal so neatly from the eternal. At bottom, man will never partake of eternity; his eternity is merely an *incessant temporality*. His temporality never ends; it is, therefore, an essential part of his permanency and inseparable from it. One confuses ideas if one opposes his temporal welfare to his eternal felicity.

Thus, the state cannot be completely indifferent to the matters that transcend the immediate concerns of "life, liberty, health, and indolency of body" and "the possession of outward things." The distinction between state and religion, Mendelssohn maintains, cannot be made at the level of the interests each seeks to advance. The state differs from religion in that it alone has the authority to shape actions through coercive laws. But it can enter into a partnership with religion in advancing, through education and persuasion, both the temporal and the eternal interests of individuals.

To see more particularly what Mendelssohn might have had in mind, we need only look at the article in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* that served as a spur for Zöllner's question in the first place. The article to which Zöllner responded had been written by a fellow member of the Wednesday Society: Johann Erich Biester, librarian of the Royal Library in Berlin and co-editor (with the educational reformer and *Gymnasium* director Friedrich Gedike) of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*.[11] His article maintained that the presence of the clergy at marriage ceremonies led the "unenlightened citizen" to feel that the marriage contract was unique in that it was made with God himself, while other contracts "are only made with men, and are therefore less meaningful." Because of this tendency to underestimate the importance of contracts unsanctified by clerical participation, Biester concluded that purely civil weddings are appropriate not only for the "enlightened citizen," who "can do without all of the ceremonies," but also for the unenlightened citizen, who would learn that all laws and contracts deserve respect (in Hinske and Albrecht 1990, 95).

Biester's intent, then, was not to remove religion from public life, but rather to teach citizens that *all* civil responsibilities, not just marriage, had a religious dimension. "How excellent," he wrote, "if faith and civil duty were more integrated, if all laws had the sacredness of religious prescription" (in Hinske and Albrecht 1990, 99).

> O when comes the time, that the concern for the religion of a state is no longer the private monopoly of a few who often lead the state into dis-

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> order, but rather becomes itself again the business of the state. . . . Then we will have once again state, citizen, patriots; undefiled would be the debased names. . . . Let politics and religion, law and catechism be one! (Ibid., 101–102)

Formulations such as these are far removed from Jefferson's "thick wall" between church and state.

One final feature of Mendelssohn's essay calls for comment. Mendelssohn (1996, 54) writes: "I posit, at all times, *the destiny of man* [*Bestimmung des Menschens*] *as the measure and goal of all our striving and efforts*, as a point on which we must set our eyes if we do not wish to lose our way." The more a people is brought, through art and industry, into harmony with this destiny, the more *Bildung* we ascribe to it. The goal is that culture and enlightenment advance together; otherwise, both will fall into corruption.[12]

Mendelssohn took this notion from Johann Joachim Spalding's *Destiny of Man*. First published in 1748, Spalding's book was one of the most successful products of enlightenment theology.[13] Through a series meditations on the questions "Why do I exist?" and "What should I do?", Spalding sought to discover a fundamental rule that could serve to guide one's life. The first possibility he considered was devoting oneself to the satisfaction of physical drives, a possibility he quickly dismissed as offering no permanent satisfaction. Spalding next weighed the possibility of pursuing a more refined sort of desire, that associated with aesthetic experience. Such a life, however, takes no consideration of one's relationship to others, and it too was rejected. Spalding then turned to the pursuit of virtue, which proved to be the first serious possibility as the human destiny.[14] Spalding, who had translated the works of Shaftesbury and Butler, agreed with them that there is a natural human disposition to work for the common good. For Spalding (1908, 25), my "natural" ability to judge matters of right and wrong is, in fact, the "voice of God, the voice of eternal truth, which speaks in me." This voice impels me to act to bring about a state of happiness that, because of the contingencies of human existence, can never be achieved on earth. However, the failure to achieve the greatest good in this world holds out the promise of a future life wherein "my constrained and beclouded soul will be given so much more light and freedom that I will be assured of a complete enlightenment of all the obscure parts of the plan by which the world is ruled" (ibid., 28). This, then, is our ultimate end: immortality in the kingdom of God.

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Spalding's account of human destiny provided Mendelssohn with what, in more recent literature, might be characterized as a "thick" theory of the human good. In the remainder of his essay in response to Zöllner's question, Mendelssohn (1784, 116; Schmidt 1996, 54) discussed how the human *telos* is subdivided, setting the stage for potential conflicts that might arise between the universal "destiny of man as *man*" and the particular "destiny of man as *citizen* [*Bürger*]." This conflict does not arise in the practical dimension of *Bildung*. The practical goal of *Bildung* is to improve a social order that is separated into different estates and bound together by a network of rights and duties. The task is to make sure that agreement between the various parts of the society is achieved. The practical aim of *Bildung* can thus be nothing other than the cultivation of a *Bürger*, a member of political society who has certain rights and duties and the skills and abilities needed to perform a specific set of tasks. In practice, then, man's cultural destiny is simply membership in civil society.

On the theoretical side of the process of *Bildung*, however, there can be a conflict between the "destiny of man as man" and the "destiny of man as citizen." Enlightenment has two differing aspects: the "enlightenment of the citizen" (*Bürgeraufklärung*), which must adjust itself according to the ranks of society it addresses; and the "enlightenment of man" (*Menschenaufklärung*), which is "universal" and pays heed neither to social distinctions nor to the maintenance of social order. "Certain truths," Mendelssohn (1996, 55) noted, "that are useful to men, as men, can at times be harmful to them as citizens." So long as this "collision" between the enlightenment of man and the enlightenment of citizen is confined to matters that do not directly address what Mendelssohn termed the "essential" destiny of man as man or man as citizen, and thus do not put into question either those aspects of men that distinguish them from animals or those civic duties that are necessary for the preservation of public order, Mendelssohn (1996, 55) saw little cause for concern, for (he argued) rules can easily be drawn up to resolve potential conflicts. It is an entirely different matter when a conflict arises between the "essential" destiny of man as citizen and either one's "essential" or "extra-essential" (*außerwesentlichen*) destiny as man.

The "essential destiny of man," Mendelssohn explained in a letter to Hennings, "is a matter of *existence*" (*Daseyn*), while the extra-essential destiny "is a matter of *improvement*" (*Besserseyn*). The first generates "perfection," the other "beauty." If it is not possible to achieve both, the latter must give way (Mendelssohn 1977, 236).[15] "In the absence of the

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essential destiny of man," Mendelssohn (1996, 55) explained in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, "man sinks to the level of the beast; without the extra-essential destiny, he is no longer a good and splendid creature."

The most severe conflict occurs in those "unhappy" times when the essential destinies of man as man and man as citizen collide. In such cases the enlightenment that "is indispensable for man cannot be disseminated through all classes of the realm without the constitution being in danger of perishing."

> Here philosophy lays its hand on its mouth! Here necessity may prescribe laws, or rather forge fetters, that are applied to mankind, to force them down, and hold them under the yoke! (Ibid., 55)

When one's "essential" destiny as citizen collides with his "extra-essential" destiny as man, the consequences are less grim. In this case it is not a question of the state avoiding our reduction to the level of a beast; it is merely that "certain useful and—for mankind—adorning truths may not be disseminated without destroying prevailing religious and moral tenets" (Mendelssohn 1996, 55).

Here Mendelssohn echoed the views of a number of his colleagues in the Wednesday Society, who saw a need to set limits to enlightenment. He argued that in such cases, the "virtue-loving bearer of enlightenment will proceed with prudence and discretion and endure prejudice rather than drive away the truth that is so closely intertwined with it" (Mendelssohn 1996, 55).[16]

Mendelssohn's conception of enlightenment thus results in an approach to politics that is difficult to square with our typical understanding of liberalism. He allowed for a considerable blurring of the boundaries between church and state, and for rather significant limitations on freedom of expression. With Spalding's notion of the destiny of man providing him with a thick account of the human good, Mendelssohn allowed for political institutions that aim at bringing about this good, even at the cost of limiting what some might see as the rights of individuals.

Certainly there are formulations, particularly in Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, that prefigure certain aspects of ideas that would eventually be found in thinkers such as John Stuart Mill (or, within the German tradition, one of Mill's own sources of inspiration: Wilhelm von Humboldt). But what prevents us from treating Mendelssohn as "anticipating" certain liberal formulations is the fact that he defended enlighten-

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ment against a contemporary who had already presented a recognizably liberal account of the state: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi—one of the Enlightenment's most vocal critics.

Jacobi's Liberal Critique of Enlightenment

Jacobi's critique of the Enlightenment reached its climax in his dispute with Mendelssohn over the question of whether Lessing, shortly before his death, had embraced Spinozism—a designation that, despite Mendelssohn's attempted rehabilitation of Spinoza in his *Philosophical Dialogues* of 1755, remained tantamount to an accusation of atheism.[17] According to a letter Jacobi wrote to Mendelssohn, during a conversation in the summer of 1780 Lessing had expressed admiration for Goethe's unpublished (and, to many contemporaries, sacrilegious) poem "Prometheus," and he had rejected "all orthodox conceptions of the divinity" in favor of the ancient Greek concept of the "One and All" (*hen kai pan*). When a shocked Jacobi asked whether this did not amount to an allegiance to Spinoza, Lessing allegedly responded, "If I were to name myself after someone, I know of no other."[18]

Behind Jacobi's letter stood a deeply held antagonism toward the political and philosophical positions of Mendelssohn and the Berlin Enlightenment.[19] Prior to his dispute with Mendelssohn, Jacobi was known primarily as the author of *Woldemar* and *The Letters of Edward Allwill*, two philosophical novels that shared some of the hostility of the *Sturm und Drang* toward the Enlightenment's purportedly one-sided emphasis on reason at the expense of sentiment and feeling.[20] Jacobi's initial literary efforts had been encouraged by Lessing, and after Lessing's death in 1781 Jacobi sent copies of his novels to Mendelssohn, seeking support in the face of less-than-favorable reviews. Mendelssohn, repelled by what he saw as the novels' excessive sentimentality, responded by suggesting that Jacobi aim for a greater "simplicity of style"—which was hardly what Jacobi wanted to hear.[21] This rebuff convinced Jacobi that Mendelssohn had been corrupted by the "magisterial, self-satisfied demeanor" that he saw as the hallmark of the "*morgue berlinoise*" (Mauthner 1912, 17; Altmann 1973, 604).

Jacobi's attack on the Berlin Enlightenment had begun several years earlier with a critique of its politics. Between 1759 and 1761, Jacobi studied in Geneva, a city that was the emblem of republican virtue for many during the eighteenth century. He returned from his studies with

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a hatred of absolutism and a contempt for "the stupidity of people who in our century regard superstition as more dangerous than the growing power of unrestrained autocracy."[22] In 1782 he published a short work entitled *Something Lessing Said*, which began by recalling a conversation in which Lessing had claimed that the arguments of princes against the rights of the papacy were all "either groundless or applied with double and triple force to the princes themselves" (Jacobi 1996, 191).[23]

The immediate point of departure for Jacobi's essay on Lessing was the publication of Johannes von Müller's *Journeys of the Popes*, a critique of the autocratic character of the rule of Austria's Joseph II. Müller's work, in turn, had been occasioned by the visit of Pope Pius VI to Vienna in response to Joseph's radical educational and ecclesiastical reforms. In the opening pages of *Something Lessing Said*, Jacobi suggested parallels between Müller's critique of Joseph and Justus Möser's critique of Frederick the Great's actions in the legal controversy involving the case of a miller named Arnold, who had sued the lord of a neighboring manor because the lord's newly constructed carp pond had drawn water away from his mill, making him unable to meet rent payments to the lord of his own manor. Frederick was convinced that Arnold had received unfair treatment from the noble judges who had dismissed his suit. When an appeals court did not find for Arnold, Frederick reversed its decision, and imprisoned not only the judges who had initially decided against Arnold, but also those who had refused to grant his appeal. While Frederick's reversal of what he regarded as yet another instance of aristocrats exploiting commoners enjoyed considerable support, Möser was troubled by what he saw as Frederick's capriciousness. In the essay Jacobi cited at the start of *Something Lessing Said*, Möser (1986, 99–100) criticized Frederick's flouting of the rule of law, and argued that a monarch "who bids compliance to a *real* truth just as he does a *formal* one overthrows the first and fundamental law, holy to every state." Similarly, for Jacobi, both Joseph's reforms and Frederick's intervention on Arnold's behalf highlighted the central failing of the advocates of enlightenment: their complicity with autocratic forms of rule, as long as the results of the policies of these rulers were seen as "enlightened."

> The great mass of our thinkers . . . want to see the essentially true and the essentially good spread *by power*, and want to see every error suppressed *by power*. They would like to help promote an enlightenment—elsewhere than in the understanding, because that takes too long. They

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> put out the lights, filled with childish impatience for it to be day. Oh hope-filled darkness, in which we hurriedly totter our way toward the goal of our wishes, toward the greatest good on earth; forward, on the path of violence and subjugation! (Jacobi 1996, 192)

Seeking to achieve substantive ends that were presumed to serve the public interest, the enlightened supporters of absolutism paid little heed, Jacobi argued, to the damage that was being done to the rule of law, the rights of individuals, and the civic life of the nation.

Jacobi insisted that civil society was, and could only be, "a mechanism of coercion" whose function should be simply "to secure for every member his inviolable property in his person, the free use of all his powers, and the full enjoyment of the fruits of their employment"(Jacobi 1996, 195). Attempts by apologists for enlightened absolutism to justify more extensive state intervention—whether justified by appeals to the "interests of state" or to the "welfare of the whole"—led only to "the advancement of self-interest, money-grubbing, indolence; of a stupid admiration of wealth, of rank, and of power; a blind unsavory submissiveness; and an anxiety and fear which allows no zeal, and tends towards the most servile obedience" (Jacobi 1996, 200). Drawing on Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society,* Jacobi argued that "enlightened" governments are in fact despotisms that corrupt civic virtue and individual morality by eradicating the freedom necessary if either is to flourish.[24]

Mendelssohn responded to Jacobi's argument in his contribution to a multi-authored critical essay that was published anonymously in the *Deutsches Museum* of January 1783. (The essay had been assembled, at Jacobi's request, out of several critical letters Jacobi had received. His purpose in having these criticisms printed was to give him the pretext for writing a response that would amplify and clarify his original argument [see Altmann 1973, 599–600]). Mendelssohn maintained that "perfectly virtuous characters can be more easily formed under a despot" than in a republic and argued that the real questions, unanswered by Jacobi, were how one might go about transforming monarchies into popular regimes and whether such a step would be advisable. Urging restraint in criticizing the political establishment, Mendelssohn asked,

> What is the point of all declamations which can lead to nothing, which should lead to nothing[?] We tell a sick person, with all the embellishments of rhetoric, that he is dangerously ill; but we do not tell him what he has to do to make himself healthy, or at least to lessen his suffering. It

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> would be better for him to think he is healthy, than to hear a truth, which cannot be useful to him. (In Jacobi 1815, 399–400) [25]

In his rejoinder, Jacobi (ibid., 409) argued that such reticence could easily be overdone. "I fully agree with the view: that one must not extinguish candles until it is day," he wrote in his response, "but it does no harm at least to undo the shutters" and thus avoid the fate of those "who out of fear of awakening too early have slept until a second sunset."

Jacobi's attack on the Berlin Enlightenment did not stop with the critique of its political views; he also questioned its understanding of the relationship between religion and reason. It was this issue that lay at the heart of the Pantheism Controversy. Jacobi's reading of David Hume and Thomas Reid had convinced him that reason cannot attain certainty about the existence of external objects, and that our experience of such objects takes the form of a revelation that is beyond argument and rests on "faith" alone.[26] Carrying this dichotomy between the spheres of faith and knowledge into theology, he argued that reason alone can never lead to certainty of God's existence. This, he claimed, was the lesson he took from Spinoza.[27]

> I love Spinoza because he, more than any other philosopher, has led me to the full realization that certain things cannot be unraveled: one must not turn one's eyes from them; rather they must be taken as they are found. . . . I must assume a principle of thought and action that remains totally inexplicable to me. (Jacobi 1994, 193)

For Jacobi, the goal of philosophy was not to explain the *reasons* for what existed. Its aim was rather simply "to disclose, to reveal existence."

> Explanation is the means, the path to a goal, the next task—never the last task. This last task is what can never be explained: the irresolvable, the immediate, the simple. (Jacobi 1994, 194)

Spinoza's importance for Jacobi lay in his relentless attempt to provide a complete explanation for the world. His failure, in Jacobi's eyes, to account for human freedom demonstrated what resisted reason and had to be taken on faith alone.

Jacobi had already provided a sketch of this discussion of the limits of reason in a passage near the beginning of *Something Lessing Said,* where

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he argued that apologists for enlightened absolutism had fundamentally misunderstood the relationship between reason and the passions:

> What distinguishes man from animals and shapes his particular species is the capacity to see a relationship among ends and to guide his conduct by this insight.
>
> Out of this source of humanity flows, in all its tributaries, the same reason [*Vernunft*], only overflowing beds and between banks of immense diversity and size and hiding its efflux from all eyes. These beds, these banks are the passions. Many have wanted to see it differently, and—against all appearances and arguments—have taken reason for the banks, and the passions for the stream. (Jacobi 1996, 193)

Jacobi was not disparaging reason. Indeed, he argued that only when "man is determined in and by himself" can he be said to be "fully human." "Where there is no freedom, no *self-determination*, there is no humanity" (ibid., 193). He was, however, insisting (like Hume before him) on the relative weakness of reason in the face of the passions. Hence the difficulty facing political theory: civil society must be "an institution of reason and not of the passions, a means of freedom and not of slavery, constituted for beings who by nature stand in the middle between the two." Because reason can "never command a passion as such," civil society must find a way of turning the passions against each other, in order "to inhibit or stop one passion by means of another (ibid., 194). A creation of human reason, civil society is nonetheless a mechanism for checking the passions by means of countervailing passions. Its ultimate concern is not with making men good, but rather with protecting them from the actions of their fellow citizens.

> That coercion without which the society cannot exist does not have as its object that which makes man *good*, but rather that which makes him *evil*; it has a *negative* rather than a *positive* purpose. This purpose can be preserved and secured through external form; and everything positive, virtue and happiness, then arise of themselves from their own source. (Jacobi 1996, 204)

If we were looking for a brief summary of what liberalism meant in the eighteenth century, it would be difficult to improve on this passage.

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Liberalism and the Limits of Reason

This brief sketch of the political views of Mendelssohn and Jacobi has led us to what may strike some as an unexpected result: Jacobi, the relentless critic of the Enlightenment, articulated a vision of civil society that was recognizably liberal, while Mendelssohn, the Enlightenment's faithful defender, elaborated a political philosophy that is, in many respects, difficult to square with liberal principles. Jacobi saw the function of legislation as fundamentally negative; its purpose was not to achieve the good, but rather to protect individual rights. Mendelssohn, in contrast, saw politics as performing an important role in the process of reaching our destiny. When the destinies of man and citizen come into conflict, the public good trumps individual rights.

Perhaps this result should not be all that surprising. "Liberalism" and "the Enlightenment" are blanket generalizations, and blanket generalizations rarely provide much insight into the messy relationships that make up the history of political thought. There are too many different tendencies within the various efforts at enlightenment in late eighteenth-century Europe to inspire much confidence in generalizations about them. Indeed, sometimes it appears that the only commentators who pronounce about what "*the* Enlightenment" stood for are those who are in the process of dismissing it (see Schmidt 1998). Similar things could be said of liberalism. Asking about the relationship between "the Enlightenment" and "liberalism" is asking for trouble.

Yet there may still be utility in such an exercise insofar as it reminds us of how multifaceted the various intellectual currents that we call the Enlightenment were, and of the role that attitudes toward reason played within both "the Enlightenment" and "liberalism." The story that has been sketched here suggests that it may well have been Mendelssohn's confidence in what reason could achieve that led him to adopt certain positions that prevent us from classifying him as a liberal. Likewise, Jacobi's doubts about the power of reason fueled both his critique of the Berlin Enlightenment and his advocacy of political positions that were more recognizably liberal than those adopted by Mendelssohn. Support for the suspicion that liberalism may best be fostered by an awareness of the limits of reason may be found in the series of essays that Kant published between 1784 and 1786 in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. Splitting the difference between Mendelssohn and Jacobi, Kant sketches an alter-

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native way of thinking about the relationship between enlightenment and liberalism.

In his 1784 response to Zöllner's question, Kant articulated a conception of enlightenment that departed in significant ways from Mendelssohn's formulation (see Schmidt 1992). Defining it not in terms of what it achieves, but rather by reference to what it escapes, Kant famously characterized enlightenment as mankind's departure from a state of "self-incurred immaturity." He thereby tied his definition of enlightenment to an uncompromising defense of the free public use of reason (see Laursen 1996 and O'Neill 1989, 28–50). Two years later, in "What is Orientation in Thinking?"—his contribution to the Pantheism Dispute—Kant insisted, against Jacobi, that in seeking "orientation" in speculative thinking, there is no need to appeal to "some alleged truth-sense, nor a transcendent intuition dubbed faith"; here, as elsewhere, "reason alone" suffices (Kant 1949, 134). At the same time he argued that Mendelssohn had greatly overestimated what reason could demonstrate, and thus failed to see that his defense of traditional proofs the existence of God represented a "dogmatizing with pure reason" that, paradoxically, culminated in "philosophical fanaticism" (Kant 1949, 297). Kant's article closed with yet another emphatic defense of the freedom of the press.

As Onora O'Neill has suggested in a number of important essays,[28] Kant's defense of free and open public discussion is central to his understanding of the nature of reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant rejected the axiomatic procedures of the geometrician as a way of establishing the authority of reason and instead developed his argument through images drawn from law and politics. *Critical* philosophy, Kant suggested, serves as "the true tribunal for all disputes of pure reason."

> In the absence of this critique reason is, as it were, in the state of nature, and can establish and secure its assertions and claims only through *war*. Critique, on the other hand, . . . secures us the peace of a legal order, in which our disputes have to be conducted solely by the recognized method of *legal action*. . . . The endless disputes of a merely dogmatic reason thus finally constrain us to seek relief in some critique of reason itself, and in a legislation based upon such criticism. (A751–2/B779–80)

When imported into philosophy, geometrical methods can produce only the "so many houses of cards" resting on foundations that must be accepted dogmatically (A727/B755). Reason, Kant argues, cannot de-

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rive its authority from such presuppositions. It "depends on freedom for its very existence" and "its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be permitted to express . . . his objections or even his veto" (A738–9/B766–7).

In his 1785 essay in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* on the relationship between theory and practice, Kant sketched a conception of the nature of civil society that was as emphatic as Jacobi's in rejecting paternalistic conceptions of political rule. Kant insisted that a "paternal government," established on the principle of "benevolence" towards its people, represented "the greatest conceivable *despotism*." He called instead for a "*patriotic* government" in which each citizen is pledged to defend every individual's right to liberty (Kant 1991, 74). Here, at last, we seem to have returned to familiar ground: a defense of enlightenment that goes hand in hand with support for liberal principles of political rule. Kant limited what enlightened reason could promise while at the same time setting restrictions on what the state could attempt to achieve. In working out the historical relationship between liberalism and the Enlightenment, Kant lends support to what the example of Mendelssohn and Jacobi has suggested: only an enlightenment that has learned to criticize itself can provide a secure foundation for liberal politics.

NOTES

1. For an overview of some of the received wisdom on this point, see Garrard 1997, 281–82. For an account of Enlightenment natural-law theory that is attentive to the ways in which these generalizations do not hold up, see Haakonssen 1996.
2. For an argument that there was one, see Porter 1981.
3. For general treatments of the Pantheism Dispute, see Beiser 1987, 44–126; Beck 1969, 352–74; and Scholz 1916, lix–lxxvii.
4. On the Wednesday Society and its membership, see Birtsch 1996.
5. I have analyzed the relationship between the published responses and the secret discussions in Schmidt 1989.
6. For a general exploration of the relationship between the liberalism and enlightenment in Germany, see Beiser 1992, 15–26 and 309–17.
7. For a discussion of the *Oberkonsistorium* and its responsibilities, see Birtsch 1990.
8. The contrast between the situation faced by French *philosophes* and the German *Aufklärer* is detailed in Hampson 1981, 45 and Whaley 1981, 117. Also, see La Vopa 1990, 35–37.

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9. The origins of the debate within the Wednesday Society may be traced to a lecture of December 17, 1783 by Johann Karl Möhsen (translated as Möhsen 1996).
10. Letter to August Hennings of November 27, 1784, in Mendelssohn, 1977, 237. Note also his letter to Hennings of June 29, 1779, where Mendelssohn describes his planned translations and commentaries on the Scriptures as "the first step towards culture from which my people is, alas, kept at such a distance" (Mendelssohn 1976, 149).
11. The article was signed with the initials "E. v. K.," a pseudonym that Beister had used on other occasions. See the editorial note in Hinske and Albrecht 1990, 484.
12. On the centrality of the notion of the "destiny of man" for Mendelssohn's work, see Hinske 1981, 94–99.
13. For discussions of Spalding's book and its impact, see Schollmeier 1967, 56–65 and Adler 1994, 125–37.
14. For the argument thus far, see Spalding 1908, 16–24.
15. My rendering of Mendelssohn's *außerwesentlichen* as "unessential" in my translation of Mendelssohn's essay (Mendelssohn 1996) now strikes me as potentially misleading. In the passages that follow, I have translated the term as "extra-essential."
16. See Hallmuth 1982, 315–45, on the debate within the Wednesday Society on this question.
17. Conversely, Spinoza was revered by radical exponents of toleration, freedom of speech, and political reform. On this underground reputation of Spinoza in Germany see Beiser 1987, 48–52.
18. For the letter, see Mendelssohn 1977, 135–53; for the statement on Spinoza see ibid., 137–38. For discussions, see Altmann 1973, 613–21; and Beiser 1987, 65–69. Saine 1997, 214, notes the importance of the hypothetical form of Lessing's response, which does not mean "that he *had* to identify himself with any group or master."
19. Altmann 1994, 6–8 treats Jacobi's general strategy in the Pantheism Dispute.
20. On the novels, see George di Giovanni's introduction to Jacobi 1994, 117–51. For discussions of Jacobi's relationship with the *Sturm und Drang* see Nicolai 1971, 347–60; Heraeus 1928, 94–95; and Pascal 1953, 3, 151–52.
21. Mendelssohn's opinion was communicated to Jacobi by Christian Wilhelm Dohm in his letter of December 18, 1781 (in Zoeppritz 1869, I:50). The letter begins with an allusion by Dohm to a warning in an earlier letter from Jacobi on the need to avoid contamination by "the Berlin spirit."
22. Letter to J.W.L. Gleim of May 31, 1782, in Jacobi 1987, 35–6. For Jacobi's early political views, see Homann 1973, 38–96. On the significance of the image of Geneva during the Enlightenment, see Venturi 1971, 84.
23. For discussions of this essay, see Snow 1996 and Beiser 1992, 145–47.
24. Long quotations from "the noble Ferguson" may be found in Jacobi 1996, 198–200. Jacobi also drew on two other defenders of republican virtue: Montesquieu (Jacobi 1996, 210n15) and Machiavelli (Jacobi 1996, 204–6). On Jacobi's use of Ferguson, see Oz-Salzberger 1995, 257–79.

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25. As support for the argument that virtuous characters can be formed more easily under despotisms than republics, Mendelssohn appealed to Lessing's decision to set his *Nathan* in Turkey, and to Socrates, who "was raised in Athens at a time when the form of government was inclined towards tyranny" (Jacobi 1815, 399). The latter example is hardly compelling; with the exception of an oligarchy imposed by Sparta briefly at the close of the Peloponnesian war, Socrates' Athens was a democracy.
26. For the importance of Hume and Reid, see Hammacher 1971, 120–21; Jacobi's most extended discussion of Hume is found in his *David Hume über die Glaube, oder Idealismus und Realismus* in Jacobi 1815, 127–288, esp. 152–53 and 156–63. This rather strange reading of Hume is aided by Jacobi's translation of Hume's "belief" by the German *Glaube* (which carries religious connotations not found, for example, in *Meinung*); see Merlan 1967 483–84 and di Giovanni's discussion in Jacobi 1994, 90.
27. For a discussion of Jacobi's use of Spinoza, see Beiser 1992, 54–55 and 79–91, and di Giovanni's discussion in Jacobi 1994, 73–90.
28. See, in particular, O'Neill 1989, 3–27, especially 14–15 and 17–20; and O'Neill 1990, 184–99, especially 190–94.

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Geoffrey M. Vaughan

HOBBES'S CONTEMPT FOR OPINIONS: MANIPULATION AND THE CHALLENGE FOR MASS DEMOCRACIES

ABSTRACT: *Thomas Hobbes denied both that opinion provides access to truth and that it ought to be protected from political manipulation. Hobbes knew that his contempt for opinion put him at odds with the classical tradition of political philosophy. What he could not have known was that it also would put him at odds with modern, liberal democracy, which protects opinions—the opinions of the public—that it cannot invest with truth value.*

Representative democracy is supposed to give political expression to the opinions of the *demos*. But why should opinions—mere prephilosophical notions—be granted such an important role in politics? An opinion is to be distinguished from the truth. It may provide access to truth, but opinion per se has an uncertain truth content. When, as in this essay, the opinions in question concern the good, the just, the beneficial, the question is why they should, as mere opinions, command respect.

Hobbes stands out in his contempt for opinion. The only respect he showed opinion was the respect he had for the power it could wield when spread widely enough and manipulated expertly. He saw nothing worthy in unmanipulated opinion itself.

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Geoffrey M. Vaughan, Department of Political Science, University of Maryland–Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250, e-mail gvaughan@umbc.edu, thanks Jeffrey Friedman and other members of Harvard University's Social Studies Colloquium for helpful comments.

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Hobbes's contempt for opinion not only presents a challenge to much of the history of political philosophy, but an especially difficult challenge to liberal conceptions of democracy. It is the latter challenge that will chiefly interest me, although Hobbes's rejection of classical dialectics will also be considered. Before turning to the role of opinion in Hobbes's philosophy, however, I shall highlight his departure from the more common practice of respecting opinions. To this end, I will look briefly at the way opinions have been viewed over time by political philosophers.

A Short History of Opinion Theory

Opinions are not demonstrable truths. Given the distinction between opinion and truth, it is surprising that the former has been approached with a certain amount of respect by political philosophers, who have not, for the most part, merely dismissed opinion as irrelevant to their inquiries. But it seems that there can be only two ways for philosophers to respect an opinion: as a source of truth, or as a philosophically uncriticizable phenomenon that is beyond the legitimate reach of politics. This distinction is not always maintained in theory or in practice, but it is a useful one with which to begin.

According to the classical tradition, opinions are the origin of truth and science when they are the starting point for dialectical reasoning (Aristotle, *Topica* 100a30). If properly handled, common opinions can be sifted by the dialectician to reveal "the principles of all methods of inquiry" (ibid., 101b3). Opinions, therefore, are not something to be scorned or rejected. Instead, they provide philosophy's access to truth. This respect for opinions carried through to the natural-law tradition of the Middle Ages. Both Christian and Muslim philosophers used the dialectical method to understand the world. There may be some dispute regarding their loyalty to this method, but they at least thought they were following it. The contemporary resurgence of natural-law theory follows very much the same approach (see Finnis 1980, 85ff.), approaching political philosophy through common opinion and therefore upholding the latter as something worthy of respect—at least provisionally.

Liberal theory, by contrast, respects prephilosophical opinions for two reasons, one skeptical and the other less so. Let me take the not-so-skeptical version first. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls uses a

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method he calls "reflective equilibrium" to balance philosophical principles with "considered judgments," giving neither one preference over the other *ab initio* (see Rawls 1995, 20). Rawls describes considered judgments as one might describe opinions: they are prephilosophical judgments that are not demonstrably true (ibid., 47ff). Although not on a par with philosophical principles, considered judgments cannot be run roughshod over. Rawls suggests that these judgments arise from our sense of justice and, therefore, must be respected for their approximation to justice itself. While this is not a return to classical dialectical reasoning, Rawls's method of reflective equilibrium reserves a very important, though provisional, place for opinions that makes them akin to a route to the truth.

Rawls can also be found on the more skeptical side of liberal theory. This side doubts the ability of philosophy to discover the content of the good for all people. In effect, conceptions of the good are seen as no more than different opinions about the good, because they are both prephilosophical and inaccessible to philosophical scrutiny (Rawls 1995, 92ff.). To this extent, opinion is a black box.

In accord with the theoretical opacity of opinions, their variety has become even more important as a starting point for his liberal theory as Rawls has reflected further on the problem. His *Political Liberalism* begins with the premise of a plurality of comprehensive doctrines, that is, a plurality of opinions (Rawls 1993, 36). Similarly, deliberative democrats (e.g., Gutmann and Thompson 1997) start with the assumption that people do and will disagree about moral propositions. Yet neither Rawls nor the deliberative democrats address this plurality by trying to disabuse people of their mistaken opinions. On the contrary, they seek to find means by which the variety of opinions might be respected by political institutions (e.g., ibid., 2). Thus, much contemporary liberal-democratic theory respects opinions not because they are true or might lead to truth; rather, such theory does not presume to judge them true or false. In this way the contents of the black box of opinion are irrelevant: it could be filled with any substance, or it could be empty. In the extreme case the liberal position defends the sanctity of an empty box. Therefore, the general definition of opinions as conceptions that are less than true is delicately balanced against a deep and absolute respect for them.

Another Kantian reason liberals offer for respecting opinions is that they bear directly on the moral dignity of those who hold them. That is to say, respect for the morally autonomous individual requires a concur-

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rent respect for that individual's prephilosophical judgments (see Richards 1986, 166ff.). This is not a mere prudential respect, such as one pays to an armed lunatic.[1] Instead, opinions command profound moral weight even though their specific content is irrelevant. Where the Rawlsian liberal and the deliberative democrat might argue for the sanctity of an empty box, this Kantian version of liberalism is not concerned with the box itself (i.e., the opinion), empty or otherwise, but with the sanctity of the manufacturer of the box—the individual.

Yet another liberal justification for the respect of opinion was offered by John Stuart Mill, especially in *On Liberty*. Mill, too, returned to something like the classical notion of dialectics, although it was only something like classical dialectics because Mill did not claim that opinions conceal the truths sought by philosophers. Instead, each opinion contains a partial truth that is revealed only through contestation (Mill 1972, 113). Yet Mill did not assume that the triumph of truth was a foregone conclusion. This victory is largely a matter of historical contingency, even though the chances of triumph are significantly improved when opinions are allowed to be freely expressed (ibid., 97).[2] Thus, toleration enjoys an important utilitarian justification: "The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race" of the partial truth the opinion may contain (ibid., 85). At the same time, Mill thought that the expression of an opinion was good for the person who was expressing it, as it is an important part of the intellectual development of every individual (ibid., 131). Therefore Mill can be seen as standing between the classical respect for opinion as providing access to truth and the twentieth-century respect for opinion as something uncriticizable. (Whether this midpoint can be consistently maintained is another question.)

From the classical philosophers through Mill and up to contemporary liberals, then, opinion has been treated with respect. By contrast, Hobbes was contemptuous of opinion. For him, opinions were neither a source of truth nor a reflection of the moral worth of the individual. As mistakes and unfounded conclusions, they should not be respected. They could be very useful, however. Even though he did not think opinions per se worthy of respect, Hobbes knew their power. Thus, opinions play an important empirical rather than normative role in his political philosophy.[3]

Standing on the cusp of the Enlightenment, Hobbes took a position between dialectics and democracy. Rejecting the tradition of dialectic, Hobbes argued that opinions provide no access to truth. Instead, sci-

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ence—or, more specifically, the new scientific method—gives us the only access to whatever truth might be available. This scientific truth is often counterintuitive: that is, it offends common opinion. Not only are opinions disconnected from or even antithetical to truth; they are the source of political problems. Opinions are variable; there can be as many opinions as there are people, or even more because the same person can hold several conflicting opinions in succession. What is worse, people tend not to recognize their opinions as mere opinions but confuse them with the truth. Conflicting opinions as conflicting truth-claims are likely to lead to political conflict. Indeed, according to Hobbes, uncontrolled opinion is the source of political conflict and civil war.

Although Hobbes feared the danger of uncontrolled opinions in civil society, he was in enough agreement with both his predecessors and his descendants to think that philosophically demonstrated truths about politics could never replace opinions in any significant way. Opinions would always be the lifeblood of politics. If properly controlled, however, they might just lead to more life than blood. In *Leviathan* Hobbes (1996, 124) wrote, "Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the wel governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions, in order to their Peace and Concord." If Hobbes is right, the sovereign can maintain the peace by maintaining a tight constraint on the number and types of opinions. Both number and type are important because, according to Hobbes's understanding of the role of opinion, a plurality of opinions will lead to political conflict. The opinions allowed by the sovereign must also be opinions that are not, in themselves, contrary to peaceful coexistence. Opinions pose a political problem whenever they are many or incompatible with the purpose of government.

The Origins of Political Opinions

According to Hobbes, most people get their opinions from the clergy and from country gentlemen, who are, in turn, beholden for their opinions to their education. "For seeing the Universities are the Fountains of Civill, and Morall Doctrine, from whence the Preachers, and the Gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (both from the Pulpit, and in their Conversation) upon the People, there ought certainly to be great care taken, to have it pure, both from the

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Venime of Heathen Politicians, and from the Incantations of Deceiving Spirits" (Hobbes 1996, 491; see also ibid., 237).[4] Whatever is taught in the universities soon becomes, therefore, the common opinion of the people, educated or not. The common people may not have the same awareness of their own opinions as those who first learned them at university, but their opinions will be the same.

Hobbes therefore wanted to ensure that the universities taught only an officially sanctioned set of opinions, which then would be spread through the commonwealth. This would reduce the potential conflict that might (perhaps necessarily) arise from competing opinions. If opinions are the levers of political action, civil discord could be avoided by controlling their movement at the source.

The most important feature of Hobbes's view is that public opinion does not begin as something common; it has to *become* common. Common opinions are neither the morally autonomous creations of the individuals who espouse them nor the incomplete images of universal truths. Political opinions are invented by particular people and then spread to others, but apart from this small group of inventors, people receive their opinions from outside. This is why Hobbes compared people's minds to blank pages waiting to be written upon by those who can make opinions (see Hobbes 1996, 233; idem, *The Elements of Law* 2.IX.8).

Hobbes's general theory of the spread of opinions is supported, but his optimistic theory of trickle-down education is undermined, by Philip Converse's important essay "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" (1964). According to Converse, there is a vertical information scale, or pyramid, upon which everyone falls in rank order from ideologue near the top to near-ideologue and then, at the very bottom level, to those whose opinions have "no issue content" (Converse 1964, 212–16). This vertical scale is remarkably similar to Hobbes's own assessment of civil society if we equate Converse's ideologue with Hobbes's university teacher, his near-ideologue with Hobbes's university graduate, and everyone else on the lower part of the scale with Hobbes's common people. Standing above Converse's pyramid is the ideology maker (ibid., 211), a position Hobbes (e.g., 1996, 254) might have reserved for himself.

Converse's schema supports Hobbes's idea that opinions are spread from those who invent them to those who probably have no idea of their source. Converse would criticize, however, Hobbes's assumption that the ideology that constrains those at the top of the scale imposes

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the same constraints upon those lower down it. According to Converse (1964, 231), "parallel to ignorance and confusion over these ideological dimensions among the less informed is a general decline in constraint among specific belief elements that such dimensions help to organize." Converse (ibid., 207) uses the term "constraint" to refer to the consistent interconnection of ideas within a belief system. For example, an American isolationist could not consistently hold that the U.S. role in NATO should be reduced while its role in the U. N. should be enlarged. Ideological constraint would demand isolationism in all cases.

The diminishing constraint on attitudes exercised by belief systems as one moves down the pyramid of ideological sophistication undermines Hobbes's opinion-based politics. Like a great oak sprung from the acorn of the university, Hobbes's system seems to assume that the tree will grow straight and sound. But Converse's evidence suggests, instead, that the branches of the tree may twist and turn, failing to rise in any one direction. Even better, and to continue the arboreal analogy, the oak should be replaced by a bramble bush, which puts down different roots and soon covers the ground without any indication of its origin. An example may serve here. Hobbes (1996, 127) thought that the English Civil War was the result of a dangerous opinion: "If there had not first been an opinion received of the greatest part of England, that these Powers were divided between the King, and the Lords, and the House of Commons, the people had never been divided, and fallen into the Civill Warre." If only people had received the opinion that sovereign authority is indivisible, there would have been no military conflict. But this assumes that people would be constrained by their conception of sovereignty. Converse would reply that only the ideologues and near-ideologues could be so constrained. This would leave the rest of the nation—"the greatest part," in fact—the possibility of reaching something different from the desired conclusions about particular questions to which an ideology of sovereignty provides answers. Thus, not even a well-orchestrated education growing out of the universities could have prevented the civil war.

Hobbes would probably have gone along with Converse's criticisms of his argument as I have presented it so far. Hobbes himself made some very similar observations regarding the efficacy of ideologies or, to use his word, opinions. Unlike Converse, however, Hobbes did not hold that opinions are the grounds of further reasoning, which can be either constrained or unconstrained. Rather, Hobbes viewed opinions as the immediate grounds of action. To understand how opinions lead

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to actions and how Hobbes made sense of this politically, we must reconsider Hobbes's arguments about opinion from the beginning.

The Political Use of Opinions

Hobbes wanted to find a way to make civil society more stable. He did not, however, develop a unique system of government that would do this. Hobbes looked behind the forms of government with the intention of providing support for all of them—whether democracy, aristocracy, or monarchy (see Hobbes 1998, 14). The particular form of government was largely irrelevant to the stability of civil society.

What Hobbes found underneath the particular forms of government was opinion. Opinion can either strengthen or weaken the government. Therefore, to make governments stronger he had to make opinions work on their behalf. This is a large task, according to Hobbes, because opinions are not political merely when they touch upon political matters. Instead, almost any opinion could pertain to a political matter because almost any opinion can lead to an action with political consequences. That is to say, almost any opinion could strengthen or weaken the government.

To deny that a given set of opinions is political is to assume that nothing within that set could affect one's political actions. This would be imprudent, according to Hobbes, for the definition of what is political and what is not is itself a political question. A distinction between the personal and the political would require agreement on the dividing line between these spheres, something Hobbes did not think was self-evident.[5] For this reason Hobbes went so far as to annex to the sovereign all rights regarding religion. The sovereign could determine the content of faith and the rituals of practice, or assign these duties to someone else. Indeed, because Hobbes thought that any opinion could have political consequences, one of the duties of his sovereign was to establish definitions, not only for political, legal, and religious terms, but for all terms (see Hobbes 1998, 5). Hobbes's sovereign was a sort of *Academie Francaise* with control over not only usage but meaning, and backed with the force of arms.

Hobbes's preoccupation with definitions stems from their role in constituting the words of which opinions consist. Without definitions, therefore, civil society is impossible and there is no escape from the state of nature. There cannot be a commonwealth without a concor-

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dance of opinion, because the commonwealth is designed to overcome the discord that causes the state of nature. Agreement in opinions leads to peace, and concordant definitions lead to agreement in opinions. In Hobbes's state of nature there is no agreement over right or wrong, just or unjust, because there is no one to establish the definitions of these terms. Opinions must be defined before anyone can understand them. But since they must be defined (somewhat) arbitrarily and are not the result of syllogistic reasoning, the definitions themselves are not knowledge but mere opinion.

Hobbes held consistently to this distinction between knowledge and opinion, in which only what is true can be known and only syllogisms can produce truth (see *The Elements of Law* I.V.2; *De Cive* II.1; Hobbes 1996, 48). By contrast, opinions must be defined by some singular authority. Otherwise each person can judge for himself, as a right of nature, whether "the actions he intends to take are necessary to the preservation of his life and limbs or not" (Hobbes 1998, 27). In the state of nature each person has a different opinion as to what is a danger and what might overcome that danger. Some will perceive a threat where others will not. More to the point, some will act upon what they perceive to be a threat. And since no one knows what another might find threatening, no one is sure that he is not under suspicion. This is what causes the constant fear characterizing the state of nature. Hobbes did not think this fear at all unreasonable. Rather, he considered it the natural condition of the human species, a condition to be overcome only through the imposition of definitions, so that common threats could be perceived.

Differing opinions cause not only the original state of war, but also the breakdown of a commonwealth and, thus, civil war. According to Hobbes in *The Elements of Law*, "where any subject hath right by his own judgment and discretion, to make use of his force; it is to be understood that every man hath the like, and consequently that there is no commonwealth at all established" (2.I.5). A commonwealth is established in order to overcome the problem of the state of nature. In the state of nature an individual can determine for himself when to use force, that is, when to attack another person. Civil society takes this right away from the individual and gives it to the sovereign alone. If it were ever to fall back to one private individual to make such judgments, it must also fall to every other individual. If not, everyone would be at the mercy of this one person without the protection of the many. In this way a commonwealth would regress to the condition of life be-

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fore its existence. In *De Cive* we find Hobbes making the same argument in response to the opinion that sovereigns are subject to the law: "This opinion is obviously incompatible with the essence of a commonwealth because it would put the *knowledge of just and unjust*, i.e. the determination of what is, and what is not, contrary to the civil laws, back into the hands of individuals" (Hobbes 1998, 134). The destruction of a commonwealth is portrayed as a return to an earlier time, as a falling back. This falling back into the state of nature occurs wherever there is a diversity of opinion.

In *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes developed an argument about a commonwealth falling into discord that is not exactly the same as falling into the state of nature. Perhaps the change had to do with his experience of the English Civil War. According to the new argument, the danger comes not from a return to individual judgments but from adherence to some common opinion: "For those men that are so remissely governed, that they dare take up Armes, to defend, or introduce an Opinion, are still in Warre" (Hobbes 1996, 125). This is not at odds with the argument developed in his earlier books, but it has a different character. First of all, the blame is put on the government for allowing its monopoly on opinion to be challenged. Second, the danger lies not so much in there being more than one opinion per individual as it lies in there being simply more than one opinion. Even with a small number of conflicting opinions, people can and will adopt one as their own and reject the opinions of others. As soon as this happens there is division and, according to Hobbes, the potential for armed conflict. A diversity of opinions—as diverse as even two—is not compatible with peaceful government. With a great plurality of opinions the full state of nature returns, but even with only a small number of opinions armed factions will arise. So long as men have different opinions, according to Hobbes, so long will they be in imminent danger of falling into war.

One might think that Hobbes believed all could be well if only everyone sat down and thought these issues through; or perhaps if everyone read Hobbes's books they would be convinced of his reasoning and they would submit to the sovereign. But Hobbes did not think that any such thing could happen. For all of his faith in science he was not a rational optimist. It is, after all, the inability of all men to reason to the same conclusion that causes the diversity of opinions and the disagreements that lead to war. "And therefore, as when there is a controversy in an account, the parties must by their own accord, set up for right Reason, the Reason of some Arbitrator, or Judge, to whose sen-

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tence they will both stand, or their controversie must either come to blowes, or be undecided, for want of a right Reason constituted by Nature; so is it also in all debates of what kind soever" (Hobbes 1996, 32; see also *The Elements of Law* 2.X.8 and *De Cive* XV.17). There is no uncoerced right reason, according to Hobbes. Uncoerced, un-"arbitrated" agreement is not possible, not because it is merely practically impossible to get everyone to arrive at the same conclusion, but because there is no one conclusion to which we all *ought* to reason.[6] Any controversy must hang on the definition of words, but these words can be variously defined, even arbitrarily defined. It is for this reason that an arbitrator is required in minor disputes and a sovereign is required in general. The sovereign must establish what shall be the received opinions, especially as to what is "good" and "just." In *Leviathan* Hobbes listed the sixth of twelve rights of the sovereign as judging "what Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what conducing to Peace" (Hobbes 1996, 124; see also *The Elements of Law* 2.IX.8 and *De Cive* VI.11). This right of the sovereign was meant to extend to all areas without limitation. Just as in the state of nature, in civil society no one can legitimately say beforehand what is a threat and what is not, so the sovereign has complete freedom to determine what opinions threaten the peace. In fact, "disobedience may lawfully be punished in them, that against the Laws teach even true Philosophy" (Hobbes 1996, 474).

The process Hobbes intended the sovereign to use to ensure a consistent opinion was the very process by which he thought threatening opinions had entered the commonwealth. He wrote in *Leviathan*: "As for the Means, and Conduits, by which the people may receive this Instruction, wee are to search, by what means so many Opinions, contrary to the peace of Man-kind, upon weak and false Principles, have nevertheless been so deeply rooted in them" (Hobbes 1996, 236). The conduits were, as we saw, the universities. If only the universities could be corrected and would teach the right doctrines, "young men, who come thither void of prejudice, and whose minds are yet as white as paper, capable of any instruction, would more easily receive the same, and afterward teach it to the people, both in books and otherwise, than now they do the contrary" (*The Elements of Law*, 2.IX.8; see also Hobbes 1996, 233). If university students were taught correctly they would then pass on their opinions to the rest of the commonwealth.

According to Hobbes, all political disputes are based in contradictory or differing opinions. This is as true in civil society as it is in the state of nature. But he did not think that this was a problem that could be over-

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come by rational means, because he did not think that it was necessarily a rational problem. That is to say, the conflict of opinions cannot be reconciled by a rational examination of those opinions, since the human capacity for reason and rationality is defective. The problem of differing opinions requires a nonrational solution: the fiat pronounced at the establishment of a state (Hobbes 1996, 10).

Unsystematic Opinions and the Will

Hobbes did not think that inducing people to reason about their opinions could solve the problem of conflicting opinions leading to open political conflict, because according to Hobbes's understanding of human psychology, people do not reason upon their opinions before acting; they simply act.

The words describing opinions may need to be defined, but in human action opinions do not play the same role that definitions do in a syllogism. Instead, opinions are the immediate cause of the will, which is the immediate cause of actions. Hobbes wrote in *De Cive*: "It is also evident that all voluntary actions have a beginning and necessarily depend on the will, and the will to do or not to do depends on the opinion each man has formed of the *good* or *evil*, *reward* or *penalty* to follow from doing or not doing the thing; so that every man's actions are governed by his opinion" (VI.11). Opinion leads directly to will. There is no intermediary. In *Leviathan* Hobbes described the will as the last appetite in deliberation (Hobbes 1996, 44). Deliberation itself is simply the sequential alternation of appetites, for or against. But deliberation is also the sequential alternation of opinions, true or false. As Hobbes saw it, the will results as soon as this back-and-forth wavering stops. If the deliberation stops at the appetite *for* something, it is judged good. If it stops at the appetite *against*, it is judged evil. A similar process takes place with opinions. Deliberation can stop with the judgment that something past or future is true or false (Hobbes 1996, 47). Deliberation is not rational.

Once an opinion is reached at the end of deliberation, the will is produced and action follows immediately. Even an appetite must be combined with an opinion of the likelihood of attaining or not attaining what is desired (Hobbes 1996, 41). Appetite alone without such an opinion does not lead to actions because only opinion can work upon the imagination, which Hobbes (1996, 38) called "the first internall be-

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ginning of all Voluntary Motions." Thus if someone has the appetite for something but the opinion that it is not possible to achieve it, no action will result. On the other hand, if the opinion is positive an action will result. In this way opinion can stop or start an action. Nothing in this process requires the dubious faculty of reasoning.

If not reason, what is it that ends the ping-pong match between contrary opinions? At some point the match stops, the ball rests on one side, and the process leads to an action. According to Hobbes, there are many reasons, all of which are external to the individual will: "For Sense, Memory, Understanding, Reason, and Opinion are not in our power to change; but alwaies, and necessarily such, as the things we see, hear, and consider suggest unto us; and therefore are not the effects of our Will, but our Will of them" (Hobbes 1996, 256). It is because the process of deliberation—unlike the process of reasoning—can be stopped by external forces that Hobbes thought people's opinions could be controlled. If deliberation were an entirely internal process this would not be so. But opinions can be produced by an external source. The deliberative process can be stopped on one side or the other by what people "see, hear, and consider." If what they see, hear, and consider comes from those they respect and of whom they have a good opinion, and those people always come down on one side of the deliberation, people's own deliberations should reach the same conclusion.

One might raise an objection to Hobbes's solution based on the loss of ideological constraint as one moves down Converse's vertical information pyramid. People at the bottom might not receive the right or complete set of opinions. If belief systems do not flow down the pyramid as cleanly as Hobbes thought they might, what would prevent people at the bottom of the pyramid from themselves having conflicting opinions? This is the problem identified by Converse as a lack of ideological "constraint." What might be a consistent set of beliefs at the apex of the pyramid could become riddled with contradictions at the base. These contradictions would be no different than the conflict of opposing opinions, because there is no reason to think that each and every member of the mass public will hold contradictory beliefs in the same pattern. Their opinions can contradict not only each other, but the opinions of others. Democrats may not be consistently democratic, and monarchists may not be consistent either.

But Hobbes was not trying to produce a consistent "belief system" or ideology. While he had a system to spread opinions—control of the universities—there is no evidence that he planned on a system of opin-

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ions. Even his long list of the laws of nature was reduced to one simple maxim in *Leviathan*, "intelligible, even to the meanest capacity; and that is, Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe" (Hobbes 1996, 109). This is not an ideology; it is a maxim.

Dialectics, Democracy, and Alternatives to the Hobbesian State

Opinions are, by Hobbes's definition, unproven. If, on occasion, they do accord with what can be proven, this is a fortunate accident and in no way a virtue of the opinions themselves. This constitutes a direct challenge to classical dialectics. At the same time it is a challenge to the liberal conception of opinions as inviolable in their plurality or immune to rational scrutiny because they bear the moral weight of the individual. The sword of Leviathan cuts backwards and forwards. Nevertheless, while Hobbes's philosophy does not preserve the traditionally important role of opinion in political speculation, it certainly leaves a large role for opinion in political practice.

The function of opinion in Hobbes's political philosophy is control: by controlling people's political opinions, Hobbes's sovereign can control their actions. There is nothing unjust or illegitimate in this because the sovereign is, after all, manipulating mere opinions. Since opinion does not afford us access to truth, it cannot be valued as a pathway to natural right. And since people acquire their opinions from outside themselves, their opinions are not important expressions of their moral dignity, or even of deeply personal convictions. Thus, opinions need not be valued for either classical or liberal reasons.

In modern constitutional democracies the rule of law is supposed to temper the effects of straightforward or pure democracy. Acknowledging the need for temperance might be taken as a nod in Hobbes's direction. Nevertheless, even in constitutional democracies opinions play a large role. Votes are cast on the basis of opinions rather than philosophical reasoning. Opinions are even polled to determine the direction of major policy initiatives. The assumption underlying both elections and polls is that the consent of the governed is necessary and even sufficient to render a government legitimate. Consent in this sense of the term, however, is not the same as consent rendered upon agreement to a philosophical argument. Political consent is, rather, the expression of an opinion. Hobbes's argument against opinion is, therefore, especially challenging to modern democracy.

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If we are going to continue to respect people's political opinions and not merely sacrifice them—as Hobbes would have us do—like pawns for the good of the king, we have two options. One possibility is returning to a dialectical method on the ancient model. This, however, can at best provide only a provisional respect for opinion. The liberal alternative must explain why plural, untrue, and philosophically inscrutable statements (i.e., black boxes) are important "facts" that must be respected, or are products of an individual's moral dignity that should not be manipulated. While the dialectical tradition may have to give an account of how prephilosophical reflections can point to something of which they are not aware (e.g., an underlying human nature), it is not so clear that the liberal respect for opinion can be maintained without a metaphysical account all its own (see, for example, Sandel 1998, 79–80). In this regard the dialectical method seems to have the easier task, because it needs only to justify a provisional respect for opinion, not an absolute respect. Moreover, liberals must take the precarious position of defending the sanctity of a box of unknown contents.

Hobbes makes it uncomfortably clear that opinion is not the same as truth. He also makes it clear that our minds rest in the realm of opinions most of the time and are often doomed to remain there. Of course this insight is not unique to Hobbes. What is unique is the way his contempt for opinion directed his political philosophy. He sought to control opinion, not to protect it or to learn from it. Because an opinion is acquired and not generated, it does not reflect anything important about the person holding it. For example, there is nothing significant about simply holding the opinion that monarchy is the best form of government. If it would do better to have the monarchist become a democrat, so be it. According to Hobbes, changing opinions does as little damage to the integrity of the individual as changing hats because opinions, like hats, are manufactured by others and merely attached to the individual. Opinions are, therefore, legitimate objects of manipulation.

Unless we are going to take the position that opinions provide a certain access to the truth, such as in the dialectical tradition, the only other response to Hobbes would be to give a different account of the origins of opinions. This second response, however, must contend with the findings of public opinion researchers, such as Converse and John Zaller (1992), who confirm that opinions do indeed have their origins outside the individual. With the rise of mass media, the possibilities of opinion manipulation have never been so real; and in mass democracies the political consequences of manipulation have rarely been so exten-

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sive. Remarkably, the theorist to capture most fully the potential for such manipulation, and to set forth the arguments most clearly justifying this manipulation, lived 300 years before it became possible to affect opinions with such facility.

Hobbes's contempt for opinion can be seen as contempt for democracy. But Hobbes presents a challenge not so much to democracy itself as to liberal democracy. In fact, it is the very possibility of manipulating opinion in mass democracies that would rescue them, in his eyes. This is far from a liberal defense of democracy. Hobbesian democracy may be, however, much more stable than liberal democracy. So unless there is a good reason to prefer an unstable state built on a plurality of half-truths (if that) to a stable state built upon well-governed opinions, we might be led in the direction of Hobbes. Perhaps the most we can promise at the outset of this journey is to have a provisional respect for opinions, but this respect is neither Hobbesian nor liberal.

NOTES

1. It may be hyperbolic to suggest that there is an armed-lunatic version of the defense of free speech, but there is certainly an argument from prudence. The prudential argument runs along the lines that freedom of speech, traditionally including freedom of the press, imposes the most severe limitations on the tyrannical temptations of governors by exposing their misdeeds. Frederick Schauer (1983, 245) makes the point that the United States Supreme Court rules in favor of free speech for these very prudential reasons.
2. The triumph of truth is largely but not exclusively accidental. Mill (1972, 97) based his hope on the assumption that truth suppressed will always come back to fight another day, a fate presumably denied to falsehood.
3. Hegel and Marx may come to mind as two who would neither jump to the defense of opinions nor use them as starting points in philosophic reasoning. This may be true, but they both turned to history as an almost independent force in human events. This obviously had important results for the way they understood opinion. Moreover, it produced in their writings a very different understanding of the term *dialectics*. To develop this line any further would take me in directions not relevant to the theme of this paper.
4. If this seems somewhat farfetched for the seventeenth century, we should remember that university education in England during the first half of that century was more common than at any other time in English history prior to the First World War (Stone 1964).
5. Hobbes was not making the point that the personal is political, but he was not going to define limits on either. Remember, he claimed that we have, as a right of nature, a right to each other's bodies (Hobbes 1996, 91).

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6. Hobbes's laws of nature might be proffered in objection to this statement. But not even the laws of nature were meant to receive the reasoned consent of the governed, or of many people at all. Instead, people were to learn simplified rules that would not require such arduous reasoning. See Hobbes 1996, 109.

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Rogers M. Smith

AMERICA'S CONTENTS AND DISCONTENTS: REFLECTIONS ON MICHAEL SANDEL'S AMERICA

ABSTRACT: *Michael Sandel's* Democracy's Discontent *traces America's woes to an erosion of community and a loss of a sense of collective self-governance. He recommends a more communitarian, republican public philosophy as the cure. His book illuminates many important historical and contemporary issues, particularly the link between systems of political economy and visions of citizenship. His methods are, however, too impressionistic to support his empirical claims. He particularly neglects the role of civic republicanism in America's history of racial, gender, and religious discrimination. Hence his call for Americans to minimize liberal doctrines of individual rights in favor of communally minded republicanism is not fully persuasive.*

In *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), Michael Sandel, the most widely cited political theorist of his generation, portrays contemporary Americans (more than the title's "democracy") as discontented. Sandel recognizes that this discontent may seem puzzling in light of the rela-

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Rogers M. Smith, Alfred Cowles Professor of Government, Department of Political Science, Yale University, P.O. Box 208301, New Haven, CT 06520, telephone (203) 432-5246, e-mail rogers.smith@yale.edu, is the author of *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (with Philip A. Klinkner) (Chicago, 1999); *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (Yale, 1997); *Citizenship Without Consent: The Illegal Alien in the American Polity* (with Peter H. Schuck) (Yale, 1985); and *Liberalism and American Constitutional Law* (Harvard, 1985).

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tive peace and prosperity that have prevailed in the United States in the 1990s. He traces it to two concerns: a sense of "loss of self-government" and a sense of "the erosion of community" in the United States. He believes that these discontents stem, in turn, from inadequacies in the nation's dominant "public philosophy," "the assumptions about citizenship and freedom that inform our public life" (3–4). His aim is to help Americans explore how to strengthen self-governing citizenship and community by analyzing the philosophical and political deficiencies in these assumptions and pointing out more promising alternatives. Philosophically, Sandel advises us to reject the conceptions of ourselves as the rational, atomistic individuals that pervade much neo-Kantian political and moral theory. Instead we should recognize that we are communally constituted moral agents who are likely to feel fully realized only through participation in the lives of the communities that have done so much to give us identity and meaning. Politically, Sandel urges us to reject the individualistic politics of competitive bargaining, rights asserting, and privatistic self-seeking. Instead we should embrace civic republicanism, a public philosophy that presents participation in democratic self-governance and public service as both obligatory and deeply fulfilling.

The questions that motivate Sandel's book and his answers to them are tremendously important. Sandel pays particular attention to the ways American politics and American political thought have historically addressed certain issues of civil liberties and political economy, and he does so in a graceful, well informed, and thoughtful fashion. Though for years I have taught courses featuring most of the sources on which he relies (he has remarkably good taste), his interpretations have provided me, at least, with fresh, valuable insights; and many of his central arguments, particularly on issues of political economy, are compelling. Yet neither the book itself nor the range of responses it has prompted since its publication in 1996 dispel my concern that his perspective is in certain vital respects dangerously incomplete, in ways that leave it open to cooptation for political uses that should be deplored.

Consequently, here I will focus on criticizing Sandel, not so much for the positions that he takes, but primarily for his failure to push far enough along the lines he sets out, both in terms of his method and his substantive arguments about citizenship and community. In so doing, however, I do not mean to imply that his book is more failure than success, for that is not the case. A critical posture toward Sandel is neces-

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sary because the problems he discusses are so significant that the major shortcomings in his analysis cannot safely be neglected.

My critique will center on Sandel's failure to attend adequately to the pervasive ways in which citizenship and community in America have been defined by traditions of racial inequality, patriarchy, nativism, and Protestant hegemony. I will maintain that greater attention to those traditions is made imperative by the very questions Sandel asks, not because of any once-fashionable "political correctness" in stressing these issues—and not (only!) because those traditions are among my own central concerns.

To see why, it is important to grasp four elements of Sandel's argument. These are first, his philosophical critique of prevailing notions of freedom, personhood, and community, which builds on his seminal first book, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice;* second, his method of inquiry; third, his effort to connect his philosophic critique with an endorsement of civic republicanism as America's best political tradition; and fourth, his contention that American political development should be interpreted as a transition from the dominance of various forms of civic republicanism to the dominance of modern liberalism after World War II, a shift that allegedly spawned current discontent. In discussing each of these elements in turn, I will indicate how Sandel's treatment seriously neglects issues of race, gender, and nativist and religious bias. I then argue that those failings call for reconfiguring some (but by no means all) of his philosophical and political roadmap to a better public philosophy.

Sandel's Philosophical Analysis

Sandel's diagnosis of contemporary ills is built on his argument that the liberal conceptions of freedom and personhood embodied in modern American political institutions are badly flawed. His famous contention is that modern liberals, such as John Rawls, conceive of persons as "unbound by moral ties antecedent to choice" and "unencumbered by aims and attachments" they do not choose for themselves, so that freedom is seen as fundamentally the capacity to make such choices (12). Sandel argues that in reality personhood is inseparably constituted by membership in "this family or city or people" or "this republic," each with a distinctive "morally relevant history" (14–15). These facts of our identity often provide us with "obligations of membership" that are "antecedent

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to choice" (15). Freedom should be understood, then, not fundamentally as the opportunity to choose our ends, but instead as the opportunity to pursue the obligations and senses of the common good defined by the particular memberships that constitute us as real, not merely abstract, moral agents.

As many have now argued, as a purely philosophic matter Sandel's effort to contrast the notions of freedom in contemporary liberalism with his communitarian understanding of personhood is overdrawn. Few liberal theorists would deny that particular memberships largely provide the senses of moral values and obligations that persons reflect upon critically in deciding what to do. Liberals simply insist that, given the multiple, often conflicting affiliations and traditions that contribute to our identities, we can and should meaningfully engage in such critical reflection (e.g., Macedo 1990, 243–47; Kymlicka 1995, 90–93). For his part, Sandel does not deny that people find themselves "claimed . . . by a wide range of different communities"; that, often, "obligations conflict"; and that deciding what to do under such circumstances "is a matter of moral reflection and political deliberation" involving difficult matters of judgment (343–44). Indeed, when Sandel discusses Robert E. Lee's dilemma, on the eve of the Civil War, as to whether he should remain a Union officer or join his home state of Virginia in defense of slavery, an institution he opposed, Sandel refers to "the choice" Lee made and "the choices" others make as a result of similar processes of "deliberation" (15–16).[1] It seems that, despite his many objections to identifying freedom purely with the capacity to choose, on Sandel's own view, moral agency involves reflective critical deliberation and difficult judgments or choices, just as liberals insist.

Yet if Sandel's critique of liberal conceptions of the self is not convincing at an abstract philosophic level, there is still much to his arguments about the baneful moral and political consequences that can result from embracing those conceptions without sufficient care. The liberal theories, judicial opinions, and policy positions that Sandel criticizes do indeed tend to stress people's capacities to disavow inherited identities, affiliations, and obligations. Less attention is generally given to why people might decide they must adhere to some memberships and why these decisions might be morally appropriate for them.

Consequently, it is plausible for Sandel to argue that liberal doctrines and policies centered on valorizing and promoting choice often fail to give much recognition or support to the senses of community and the moral bonds that are probably necessary to motivate many kinds of

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civic engagement and concern for various sorts of common goods. As Sandel contends, liberal accounts trumpeting the rights of abstract individuals fail to provide reasons why a given individual might decide that being a member of this family, church, or republic is something of great moral significance. They therefore can foster an initially liberating but ultimately daunting "moral void" (323)—the impression that all courses of action are equally up for grabs and that there are no standards to decide among them. This impression may drive many people toward self-confidently didactic forms of "intolerance and other misguided moralisms," such as national chauvinism, racial and ethnic prejudice, and religious bigotry (5–6, 323). Ironically, perhaps, Sandel's critique of liberal conceptions of the self seems more compelling at the political than the metaphysical level.

Nor is it at all clear that Sandel's metaphysical alternative better protects against these political dangers. If liberal conceptions of the self open the door to bigotry through their dismissiveness toward valued memberships, Sandel's notion of "encumbered" selves opens that door in a more straightforward way. As his liberal critics have long argued, if people are morally bound by obligations to constitutive communities they did not choose, then we may have no ground for opposing their decision to side with, say, communities championing white supremacy and slavery, as Robert E. Lee did. By example more than argument, Sandel suggests that the complexities of our histories, traditions, and memberships usually provide resources for more appealing choices: he indicates that Germans may feel special obligations to Jews and "American whites to American blacks" (15). But he cannot assure us that these either will be or should be the outcome of the communitarian deliberations Germans and American whites undertake. Such assurance would require either a moral standard external to people's constitutive traditions, which Sandel disavows; or a claim to know their deepest identities and allegiances better than they do themselves, which would be both disrespectful and implausible. Hence Sandel admits, honestly enough, that he is offering a "risky politics, a politics without guarantees" (321).

Sandel allows, however, that though we probably cannot know other persons' encumbered identities sufficiently to decide for them just what their ultimate obligations are, we are entitled to try to persuade them that certain decisions are "misguided." A Kentucky-born fellow like Abraham Lincoln, for example, might have had something persuasive to say to a Virginian like Lee about why Southern whites should be in-

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spired by their revolutionary heritage to fight against slavery rather than on its behalf (though whether the scion of an aristocratic family would listen to the child of a poor frontiersman is debatable). But if such persuasion is to take place, it seems imperative that we have a rather full understanding of the communities, traditions, and senses of affiliation that have helped constitute the moral identities of the people we would persuade. That is one reason why, on his own terms, it is a serious deficiency that Sandel engages in no sustained examination of the intolerant traditions of racial, gender, ethnic, and religious identity that he wishes Americans to judge as "misguided." If those traditions have played an important role in constituting modern Americans, as they undeniably have, they cannot be wished away. Ignoring constitutive traditions is, after all, precisely the error with which Sandel rightly charges many liberals. Yet he adopts a method of inquiry that makes it all too easy for him to do the same.

Sandel's Historical Method

Though Sandel is a skilled analyst of philosophic texts, as his first book demonstrated, in *Democracy's Discontent* his main objects of analysis are judicial opinions, political speeches, and government reports, policies, and practices. Contending that political "practices and institutions" are "embodiments of theory," Sandel seeks "to identify the public philosophy implicit in our practices and institutions." Once teased out and evaluated, Sandel suggests, the problems of these embodied "ideals" may clarify "the predicament of American democracy" (ix–x). As noted, he is particularly concerned to identify those elements of American public philosophy that might play a "formative" role in strengthening capacities for citizenship—i.e., participation in "self-government"—and in fostering a motivating "sense of community and civic engagement" (ibid., 6).

This enterprise seems to me eminently reasonable. There are, however, two methodological issues that must be confronted in pursuing it. The first is to decide what practices and institutions ought to be examined. The second is to decide what system of surveying or sampling them should be employed.

Perhaps because he is writing as much for a popular as a scholarly audience, Sandel says nothing about either of these issues. The answers implicit in his own practices, however, are unsatisfactory. He confines

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himself chiefly to examining the litigation and statutory law governing three civil-liberties topics (religious liberties, freedom of speech, and rights of privacy, especially in relation to family law), and to studying more extensively the visions of political economy that have been advanced by American political actors from the founding era to the present. His method of surveying these topics seems to be simply to read extensively about them in both primary and secondary sources, collecting quotations that illustrate the arguments he wishes to make.

In the hands of a talented scholar like Sandel, these methods bear some valuable fruit. Judicial opinions and legislative statutes concerning these civil-liberties issues certainly are useful for illuminating political thinking about the character of citizenship and freedom; and by stressing that, until roughly the New Deal, many American leaders evaluated economic arrangements heavily in terms of their role in forming citizens, Sandel is highlighting neglected concerns of the first importance. Sandel's characterizations of the different views discernible in the sources he examines are also always plausible and often persuasive. There is little question that the themes he unearths have indeed been present and significant in American public life.

There *is* a question, however, whether Sandel presents an adequate picture of all the themes in American public life relevant to the issues he is addressing. If one is interested in how American institutions have treated the issue of forming citizens and a sense of community, an obvious place to look is surely the body of laws governing access to and exit from American citizenship and the American political community. Naturalization laws, immigration laws, expatriation laws, laws governing territorial inhabitants, the voting rights of different groups (since capacities for self-governance are at stake), and the relationship of state citizenship to national citizenship, all would seem relevant, among other matters. And though Sandel is right to suggest, with Herbert Croly, that civic education involves more than what occurs in schools (220), the explicit and implicit civic lessons taught in public schools also seem to warrant scrutiny.

My work on these very laws, institutions, and practices (Smith 1997) provides confirmation for many of Sandel's characterizations of civic republican and modern liberal traditions in American history. But there is also overwhelming evidence of traditions that he barely mentions. These traditions long gave priority to visions of the American civic community less as a self-governing republic or a protector of rights of personhood than as a Christian nation, a white man's nation, a patriar-

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chal nation, and a nation to be governed by those native to it. The enormous formative roles of these laws for American citizenship and community is hinted at by the facts that for over 80 percent of U.S. history, the majority of the world's population was legally denied access to full U.S. citizenship (including voting rights) explicitly on grounds of race, ethnicity, or gender; and that for roughly two-thirds of U.S. history, the majority of the domestic adult population was legally denied full citizenship on the same grounds. Though their power has faded, the distribution of power, resources, and status throughout most American institutions is still heavily marked by these traditions, and they do not lack for influential contemporary adherents.[2]

Sandel does not analyze the citizenship laws just mentioned, and he makes only brief references to the features of American life they represent. He does so, moreover, chiefly to assure readers that though republicanism sometimes "provided the terms within which" exclusionary practices were "defended," these sorts of exclusions are not in fact "intrinsic to republican political theory" (6, 318–19). Sandel offers no real argument for this controversial claim, although it is quite plausible. Yet if the claim is correct, we must look beyond republican theory to understand these exclusionary and subordinating practices and institutions that are so formative of the American civic community. Sandel, however, gives virtually no consideration to the nonrepublican arguments that were used to defend white supremacy, Jim Crow laws, efforts to restrict voting to the native born, race-based immigration restrictions, the explicitly Protestant curriculum of the nineteenth-century public schools, and the denial of suffrage to women. Similarly, in discussing the modern civil rights movement (314, 318–19) he pays little attention to earlier black political movements, religious movements, women's-rights movements, and immigrants'-rights movements that warred against civic exclusion and oppression.

Though he leaves these topics largely unexamined (without offering any reason for doing so), Sandel is not reluctant to contend that republicanism as he defines it, devoted to the "common good of self-government," predominated in American life up until roughly "the last forty or fifty years"; and that modern liberalism as he depicts it, devoted to personal freedom to choose and pursue one's "own interests and ends," has predominated since then (4–5, 26, 123–275). He seems confident that he knows what "most Americans" believed about such issues as wage labor in every period of U.S. history (ibid., 188). And though he recognizes that some Americans have valued republican self-govern-

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ment only instrumentally, as a means to other ends, he seems certain that those other ends can be dismissed as relatively unimportant for American civic identity in comparison to republican and liberal aims (26). He classifies each of the many figures of U.S. history whom he discusses as embracing chiefly either "civic republican" or "voluntarist," liberal conceptions of freedom without attending to other notions of liberty, justice, and the human good they may have held. Thus, for instance, he suggests (albeit tentatively) that voluntaristic liberalism has come to prevail in recent decades because it holds out the promise that macroeconomic policy can enable each consumer to buy ever more of whatever he or she wants (262). Perhaps this is right. But since important aspects and traditions of citizenship and community go unexamined by Sandel, how can we be sure that the evidence he does present supports such sweeping claims about the dominant themes in American political life?

Indeed, even in the areas Sandel does consider, we may legitimately ask, How representative are the admittedly supportive quotations we are extensively provided? There are, after all, many cases in which even contemporary judges (admittedly often in dissent) express concern to honor the nation's religious traditions; more cases in which they define the scope of free-speech rights in terms of the requirements of republican self-governance; and important cases in which they refuse to agree that rights of privacy shelter conduct traditionally branded immoral.[3] There is also extraordinary variety in the claims advanced in related legislative and policy debates. I do not dispute Sandel's contention that religious practices, speech, and unconventional private conduct are now often said to be all equally respectable expressions of capacities of autonomous choice. But what is the prevailing mix of these and other claims? It is difficult to answer this question when Sandel does not identify what he takes to be the relevant body of evidence and does not employ any systematic method for either sampling or canvassing it.

Because Sandel looks at relevant but very partial evidence and appears simply to select examples that confirm his analysis, it is difficult to place great confidence in his claim to have discerned the predominant civic ideals and theories implicit in American institutions throughout U.S. history. To be sure, the method of "selecting for the dependent variable" is typical of historians of political ideas; but it is too casual and impressionistic to support the strong empirical claims about American beliefs made in this book. These claims are all the more suspect because

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Sandel marginalizes much that has been central to the formation of American citizens and the American political community.

Sandel's Turn to Republicanism

Rather than address such disturbing traditions directly, Sandel chooses to highlight the political attractions of civic republican traditions in American life. That choice is understandable. Republicanism has indeed been a centrally constitutive American tradition. It was the dominant discourse through which the American revolutionary cause was articulated. Though republican themes have since waned, they have nonetheless always been important strains in American discourse on which a normative theorist such as Sandel can reasonably hope to build.

Virtually any variety of republicanism involves a commitment to civic virtue, understood as practices of citizenship that contribute to the common good of a self-governing community, in contrast to unbridled individualism or moral aimlessness. The theorist who may have exercised the greatest influence on modern democratic republicanism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, presented republican self-governance as appropriate in principle for all humanity, not as properly confined to any particular race, nation, culture, or sect (Rousseau 1968). Hence Sandel can contend that communal particularisms are "not intrinsic to republican political theory," and he can hold out the hope that, as the idea that some people are not capable of civic virtue becomes discredited, "the tendency of republican politics to sanction" unjust exclusions can be eliminated (319).

Yet even within Sandel's terms, there are several grave problems posed by a turn to republicanism, none of which he addresses very fully. The first is the flip side of the point just made. Precisely because Enlightenment-influenced, democratic varieties of republicanism present republican self-governance as suitable for all humanity, such republican theories do not provide any more argument than modern liberal theories do as to why people should be citizens of some particular republic rather than any other. Rousseau is as much a theorist of the social contract as John Rawls. As Sandel quite plausibly insists, any such "contractual vision of community alone" does not explain "why *these* persons, the ones who happen to live in my country, have a claim on my concern that others do not." Republican theory does not really explain

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why one's deepest identity is "bound" to that of the other parties to the social contract, or why a given republic is not "an arbitrarily defined community" (17). If an engaged politics really does require citizens who see their moral identities as inextricably linked to a particular community in ways antecedent to their choice, the sorts of inclusive, democratic republican theories with which Sandel sides do not seem to be the answer.

There are two possible replies to this objection, but they only lead into further difficulties. The first reply is that, although republican theory per se does not present any particular community identity as intrinsic to persons, in the United States that does not matter. Because republicanism does happen to be one of the nation's key constitutive traditions, it is one that all Americans must give great weight when deciding upon their most obligatory affiliations and values. Republicanism is, in fact, part of what it means to be an American. But even if we grant this point, we still need an argument as to why Americans should decide that republicanism is their most centrally defining tradition and that the republican vision of the common good trumps other possible obligations of Americans.

That is a tall order. Sandel is well aware that many Americans are likely to find what he terms the "strong version of the republican ideal," which defines human liberty and moral achievement strictly in terms of participation in "the public life of a free city or republic," as too narrow and constraining. Like Oscar Wilde, most of us do not want political meetings to take up so many of our evenings, or even our prime-time viewing hours. Sandel responds by stressing that there are more "modest" versions of republicanism that "see civic virtue and public service as *instrumental* to liberty," versions that include lots of "liberty to pursue our own ends," not just freedom to participate in politics (26). Hence republicanism need not generate pressures to accept a single narrow vision of the common good. It can promote the "democratic" realization of a "higher pluralism of persons and communities who appreciate and affirm the distinctive goods their different lives express" (116, 319–21).

This latter claim implicitly makes an "overlapping consensus" case for republicanism, not so different from the case Rawls has come to make for liberalism. Yes, Sandel suggests, Americans probably will, on reflection, find varying senses of community and a range of notions of their own ends morally compelling. Still, most will be able to see republican civic virtues and the republican view of the American political com-

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munity as contributing to the realization of their other important moral memberships and values.

To make this case credibly, however, Sandel would again have to do what he avoids. He would have to address the multiple senses of political community and identity that have been constitutive of American life, including not just liberal and republican but racial, religious, and patriarchal ones, among others. He would have to show that they can all "be redescribed without loss" as variants or allies of republicanism as he defines it, rather than as variants or allies of liberalism or some other perspective (65).

It is far from clear that he could reach that conclusion. Set aside the fact that historically, many Americans clearly opposed any republicanism that did not present America as a white- and male-governed republic. Even today, many Americans would surely be offended by Sandel's contention that their religious beliefs are worthy of political respect only insofar as they have "a tendency to promote the habits and dispositions that make good citizens," so that only "religious beliefs and practices" that have "sufficient moral or civic importance" from a republican perspective "warrant special constitutional protection" (66). The tendency to structure and regulate religion for the good of the republic is indeed deeply embedded in republican theory and practice (see, e.g., Rousseau 1968, 87, 176–87). However, many religious believers may well see it as cynical, even sinful to treat freedom of religion as a mere instrument of political goals, rather than as a suitably respectful recognition of their constitutive moral identities. And as with religion, so with many other nonrepublican conceptions of community and purpose that Americans hold: when its implications are clear, Sandel's view may well repel rather than recruit those who do not think that what they value can or should be subordinated to republican conceptions of the common good.

That possibility is only increased by the second way republicanism can be connected with traditions presenting the American political community as a distinctively compelling membership for American citizens. Though republican theory does not provide grounds for saying that republicanism is intrinsically the most just and right political philosophy for any particular subset of humanity, the theory does counsel legislators to foster loyalty to their republic by building on the uniquely defining customs, histories, and religious and cultural traditions their citizens may share, so as to foster a sense of a unique and valuable national identity. Thus, in *The Government of Poland* Rousseau urged any

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lawmakers who might form an independent Polish republic to support "distinctive" institutions such as "religious ceremonies" that would be "in essence exclusive and national," as well as "games" and "public spectacles" inspiring patriotism, which would be adaptations of already deeply entrenched and valued national practices, such as the tradition of Polish circuses (Rousseau 1972, 8, 11–16). Rousseau and other republicans also argued that the fellow-feeling required for civic virtue grows more naturally amidst considerable civic homogeneity. Hence adherents of customs and faiths too different from a nation's predominant ones can properly be excluded from its citizenry (Smith 1997, 84–85).

Sandel does not deny this exclusivist aspect of republicanism. Indeed he calls attention to the way "the republican tradition emphasizes the need to cultivate citizenship through particular ties and attachments" (117). But this means that, although Sandel is right to say that republican theory does not intrinsically endorse any particular civic exclusions, republican theory does actively urge the state to ally ifself with senses of national identity that may well be harshly exclusionary. It does so precisely to support the stronger senses of community and civic attachment that Sandel is seeking.

As Sandel briefly concedes, in America alliances between republicanism and particularist traditions of national identity have often taken the form of arguments that blacks, women, Hispanics, Catholics, Southern and Eastern Europeans, and the foreign-born generally lack the capacity to be full republican citizens (Sandel 1996, 6; see generally Smith 1997). The historian Edmund S. Morgan (1975) went so far as to argue that, even if republicanism might not require such exclusions in theory, in America republicanism could not have originated without the institution of chattel slavery that provided leisure for political activity and prompted an obsession with freedom. Though Sandel wishes to reject any necessary connection between American republicanism and racial inequality, much less slavery, he nonetheless criticizes as "blind" the liberal view that "such differences between persons as race, religion, ethnicity, and gender" do not "really define our identity" (13). If we follow Sandel and see such categories as constitutive of the identities of many Americans, and if we ally ourselves with republican traditions that call for cultivation of particular ties and attachments, surely we face severe problems. How can we be confident that the Americans thus constituted can be persuaded to embrace their republican heritage while disentangling it from exclusionary and subordinating traditions? What in

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republicanism gives us compelling grounds to argue that they *should* do so?

At a minimum, these questions deserve more attention than Sandel gives them. Admittedly, it might be true that if we viewed American experience more fully, we would conclude that Sandel's categories capture so much that his omissions are relatively unimportant. In the next section I will suggest, to the contrary, that his account of American history is substantially flawed by the ways in which he translates almost every position into a version of either civic republicanism or liberalism, and by his neglect of exclusionary civic commitments that overflow those categories. When these flaws are diminished, the case for many of the political lessons Sandel draws from American history diminishes as well.

Sandel's Civic History

If our aim is to identify the traditions that have constituted the identities of American citizens, the ideas that were most powerful in the nation's formative period may well be especially significant. Sandel's categories of republicanism and liberalism, however, do not permit him even to note perhaps the most prevalent understanding of freedom and citizenship in the late colonial period. As Barry Shain (1994) and others have suggested, for most colonial Americans liberty meant, above all, conformity to the will of the Christian God, "whose service is perfect freedom." Many rallied to the revolutionary cause not so much to create a republic as to escape from corrupt Britain and fulfill their providential mission as a "redeemer nation" (Tuveson 1968). It is true that in much Revolutionary rhetoric, this sense of religious mission incorporated republicanism, so that the new nation was to be a "Christian Sparta," in Sam Adams's words (Smith 1997, 74–75, 85). Later, as Sandel notes without criticism, this view issued in public schools that propagated republicanism as a political faith—alongside "nondenominational Protestantism" as the standard for "morals and religion" (166). Even if we see the longstanding association of republicanism with Protestantism as simply promoting social understandings conducive to republican self-governance, this history still suggests that disentangling American civic republicanism from religious intolerance may be a far more complicated task than Sandel suggests. In fact, many believers today think that it is the loss of this sense of America as a Christian nation—a loss that is

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entailed by embracing either Sandel's democratic republicanism *or* liberalism—that is most responsible for the contemporary "moral void." Hence they may well be dissatisfied with the subordination of religious goods to the cause of republicanism that Sandel advocates.

Similarly, in the Revolutionary era, the American champions of the rights of man defined gender roles by blending Biblical depictions of the place of women with a republican insistence that the political and military obligations of citizenship require manliness. The result was a pervasive and long-enduring endorsement of female disfranchisement, rendering women much less than equal participants in republican self-governance (Smith 1997, 76–77, 111–114, 146–48). Though their power, too, has diminished, arguments that a woman's place is in the home have ever since remained significant in American political life. Sandel has virtually nothing to say directly about this exclusionary and subordinating civic tradition. He does not discuss how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century champions of female suffrage eventually succeeded by relying chiefly on a combination of nativist and republican themes that left many forms of gender inequality intact (Smith 1989, 273–75). He does give some account of the costs and benefits of liberal reforms that have eroded those surviving inegalitarian features of American law in the last quarter century (108–115). Sandel deems the recent changes "at best a mixed success," out of legitimate concern for the condition of women who fulfill many traditional domestic duties without possessing either traditional protections or alternative resources (110). But this ambiguous normative assessment, along with Sandel's advocacy of a republicanism that affirms various particular identities, leaves open the possibility that the earlier mix of more equal political rights, and the preservation of traditional gender roles in other respects, might be preferable from a modern civic republican perspective. In any case, the political status of half the population is far too central an issue for the constitution of American civic identity to receive the cursory treatment Sandel provides.

The native tribes, and the arguments used to justify their massive displacement and near-eradication, get even less attention from Sandel. One could read his book and never realize that the North American continent was not simply waiting for the taking by Europeans. He refers only to "foreign powers such as Spain that posed obstacles to western expansion" by early American citizens (137), and he describes the western North American territories (all of which were, in fact, claimed by native tribes) as "open land" (139). Later, Sandel discusses

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Jacksonian political economy without any reference to what Jackson proudly presented in his Farewell Address as his leading contribution to the shaping of America, his Indian removal campaign (cf. Smith 1997, 197, 235–37). Other scholars have seen the great conflict of Euro-American settlers and indigenous North American peoples as central to the constitution of America's civic, racial, religious and even psychic self-conceptions (e.g., Rogin 1975). Perhaps that assessment is overstated, but surely this dimension of the making of "Americans" merits some comment.

Sandel does discuss the other great illiberal institution of antebellum political economy, chattel slavery. Yet he does so without analyzing America's long history of officially constructed racial hierarchies. Sandel makes no reference at all to racial defenses of slavery. Only Southern criticisms of capitalism catch his eye (175–77). He also fails to mention how the champions of slavery's expansion elaborated racist denigrations of Mexicans to spur support for the explicitly imperialist Mexican-American War, a war that radically reconfigured the geography, resources, and populations of both the United States and Mexico. Sandel merely notes that opponents of the war like Daniel Webster expressed reservations about making Mexicans into American citizens (163). Similarly, the first of his few mentions of "racist terms" in American political discourse comes when he calls attention to the antiblack attitudes of some "antislavery politicians"—in the course of criticizing their endorsement of the "voluntarist" liberal institution of wage labor (180–81).

Sandel surely does not really wish to associate racism more with the Northern opponents of slavery than with its champions. But his failure to analyze American racism, which briefly lurches into his account *ex nihilo* in the late 1840s and is little discussed thereafter, leaves us ill equipped to grasp the civic understandings that prevailed in either the antebellum North or the South, and that generated not only the Mexican-American War but also the Civil War. It is hard to see how an account of the civic conceptions that have constituted America can be adequate with those elements of the story omitted. It is also disturbing that, in a book advocating civic republicanism, Sandel seems to strain to link racism with advocates of liberal ideas while minimizing the liberalism, and exaggerating the republicanism, of those opposing racial inequality.

Sandel's discussion of the Lincoln-Douglas debates best exemplifies this pattern. Sandel makes no mention of Stephen Douglas's frequent

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contention that citizenship should not be extended to "inferior" races, since the United States was made "by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by white men" (Johannsen 1965, 33). Instead, Sandel criticizes Douglas's advocacy of popular sovereignty, of permitting the white male electorate in every territory and state to decide the slavery question for itself, as an example of the "bracketing" of substantive moral questions that he associates with modern "minimalist liberalism" (21–22). This populism is, Sandel repeatedly suggests, similar to the suggestion that each state (or each woman) should decide on abortion for itself (or herself) (21, 102).

Sandel thus obscures the fact that Douglas's doctrine of popular sovereignty was preeminently an example of American republicanism, which appeals to the ideal of self-governing communities and to the notion that self-governance is often best done at subnational levels—a view that Sandel himself later endorses (345–48). Douglas's desire to tolerate the states' denials of self-governance to blacks, moreover, plainly stemmed not from "minimalist liberal" bracketing but from the racism that Sandel does not discuss. Nothing could be more distant from the concept of an "unencumbered self" than an outlook that contends, as Douglas did, that blacks or Chinese were not "men" within the meaning of the Declaration of Independence because of their racial identities. By connecting Douglas's stance to modern liberalism instead of to racism and states'-rights republicanism, Sandel is not only wildly unhistorical. He hampers efforts to judge accurately the role republicanism has played and might play in defining American civic identity.

Sandel is more historically acute when he turns to Lincoln. Though he observes that Lincoln also opposed the suffrage for blacks (without mentioning that Lincoln eventually endorsed it, provoking John Wilkes Booth to assassinate him), Sandel allows that Lincoln insisted that slavery was morally wrong and that blacks were entitled to the rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence (181). However, lest this make Lincoln a liberal, Sandel insists that he had an "artisan republican" conception of freedom because he did not think Americans would work for wages their whole lives (182–83). Yet he acknowledges that Lincoln never opposed wage labor, as many proponents of republicanism did (174, 185). And the very fact that Lincoln only slowly came to accept black suffrage demonstrates that his opposition to slavery was grounded not in a concern for republican self-governance so much as in his evolving understanding of the basic rights of human nature and of divine justice, though Lincoln certainly did believe slavery was an al-

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batross for American republicanism. The reality is that neither "civic republicanism" or "minimalist liberalism" capture the thought of Lincoln *or* Douglas. Their debate is significantly distorted by reading it through such narrow lenses. And the issue that is most distorted is the issue that was most fundamental between them: whether or not blacks were entitled to basic human rights.

Sandel's failures to encompass American racial conflicts within his framework only multiply as his account proceeds. Sandel rightly characterizes as "voluntarist" the rise of judicial activism in the service of contractual liberty during the antiregulatory *Lochner* era of the early twentieth century (42). He makes no mention, however, of the way the post-Civil War court invalidated and restrictively read Reconstruction laws designed to protect the civil rights of blacks, such as the 1875 Civil Rights Act. That statute was struck down in the *Civil Rights Cases* of 1883 on the ground that it intruded on matters of self-governance that were reserved, in decentralized republican fashion, to the states. Republican appeals to states' rights were ubiquitous in the judicial opposition to Reconstruction that prevailed in the late nineteenth century (Smith 1997, 330–37, 371–76).

Sandel is impressed by the concern for the formation of good citizens that characterized the Progressive era (208–21). But he says nothing about how this concern was expressed through support for Jim Crow laws, colonial rule over the nonwhite populations acquired in the Spanish-American War, and mounting race-based immigration restrictions—all policies justified, in part, by the claim that nonwhite races needed long-term tutelage under white Americans before they would be ready for republican self-governance (Smith 1997, 429–53). Similarly, Sandel applauds Woodrow Wilson's worries about the civic consequences of large-scale capitalism and Theodore Roosevelt's awareness of the need to foster a stronger sense of national citizenship (214–19). He does not, however, mention Wilson's ardent and influential support of segregation, or Roosevelt's advocacy of imperialism as an expression of the master status of America's English-speaking, European-descended races (King 1995, 6–17).

Sandel's minimization of these constitutive racial strains in American public life is astonishingly pervasive. He writes unblushingly that, once the Supreme Court struck down compulsory flag salutes in the West Virginia public schools in 1943, "the procedural republic had arrived" (54). At that time the race-based National Origins Quota system for immigration, Jim Crow laws (which included mandatory segregation,

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black disfranchisement, and laws against miscegenation), an explicitly Protestant public-school curriculum, and extensive restrictions on women's economic rights all remained in effect in the United States. To suggest that at that point America had gone too far toward emphasizing the equal rights of persons abstracted from their racial, gender, and religious identities is to present a portrait of American civic identity that is historically invalid.

Yet it probably matters most that Sandel's narrative retains these same deficiencies when it reaches contemporary America. At that point Sandel cannot wholly avoid a fact that is deeply problematic for his analysis. Though Sandel highlights Americans' partial embrace of Keynesian economics as the source of modern liberalism (262, 273), in reality the kinds of civil-liberties decisions and interventionist economic policies that he associates with modern liberalism were more obviously connected to the transformations wrought by the civil-rights movement. As William Galston (1991, 268–69) has noted, the contemporary developments that preoccupy Sandel—the judicial decisions combating Protestant establishmentarianism, the expansion of freedom of expression, the enhancement of women's autonomy, and the anti-poverty measures of the Great Society—all resulted, in part, from the civil rights movement and its inspiration of protest movements advocating women's rights, welfare rights, and the rights of religious minorities. Correspondingly, a significant portion of the opposition to modern liberal policies stems from dissatisfaction with the erosion of traditional statuses those movements wrought.

Sandel cannot deny this last point: his whole analysis pushes him to worry about how recent decades have seen the "eroding" of those forms of community, including traditional "families and neighborhoods" and "ethnic and religious communities," that he sees as having long provided Americans with "a source of identity and belonging" (294). But he does not wish to oppose the civil rights and other protest movements, at least not sharply. Hence he vaguely traces the erosion of traditional communities to unspecified "circumstances of modern life," to Keynesianism, and to Americans' otherwise unexplained choice to adopt a "voluntarist self-image" (203, 262, 294).

As he did with Lincoln, Sandel also tries to claim the civil rights movement for his cause by contending that, despite its apparent liberal concern for human rights and nondiscrimination, it was in fact "the finest expression of republican politics in our time" (348). Though Sandel concedes that the movement generated civil-rights and voting-

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rights laws that "served freedom in the voluntarist sense," he maintains that it was forged from "particular identities and places," especially "the black churches of the South" (348–49). It also, he contends, displayed the "higher, republican freedom" of collective self-governance, not just concern for individual rights (348).

Sandel is not wholly wrong. Vital religious and republican aspects of the civil rights movement are not captured in many versions of modern liberal theory espousing equal rights. Yet it is also hard to deny that the civil rights movement *was* importantly about the expansion of personal capacities to choose one's way of life free from invidious discrimination, which Sandel portrays as the heart of modern liberalism. Which of these elements—republican, religious, or liberal—were most fundamental to the civil rights movement? Sandel really provides us no way to tell, though he writes as if it is clear that the republican strains were not only "higher" but deeper. However, he also repeatedly criticizes Thurgood Marshall's judicial opinions as articulating precisely the voluntarist liberalism Sandel opposes (93, 106). One might be forgiven for viewing Marshall as being at least as authoritative an exponent of the philosophy of the civil rights movement as Sandel. But this would suggest that we should not see that movement as essentially "republican."

Sandel cannot deny that at least some of the attacks on the transformations wrought in the 1960s stemmed from the deeply entrenched attachment to white supremacy that produced Jim Crow laws in the first place. But he maintains, without supporting argument, that "beyond the undeniable element of racism" in the increasingly successful electoral appeals of George Wallace and other conservatives from the late 1960s on, there lay "a broader protest against the powerlessness many Americans felt toward a distant federal government" (298). Sandel seems confident that racism is a minor part of the modern story, even though he no more addresses the question squarely here than elsewhere in the book.

Let us consider one last topic Sandel fails to discuss: the rise since the 1960s of advocates of public recognition of group rights, including special rights of access to and representation in public institutions for disadvantaged racial and ethnic minorities, women, and some religious communities. These positions represent extensions of the agenda of at least some portions of the 1960s civil-rights and women's movements, but they do not easily fit into Sandel's account of modern American public life as dominated by a voluntaristic liberalism that has no place for conceptions of racial, ethnic, or gender identity. Instead, the advo-

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cates of affirmative action, majority-minority districts, anti-pornography laws, hate-speech codes, and "multicultural" educational programs are now often assailed as betraying colorblind and gender-neutral commitments to individual rights. In the last two decades, attacks on these measures have been at least as audible in the rhetoric of conservative politicians criticizing what they take to be modern liberalism as have assaults on Keynesian economics or liberal individualism.

What does Sandel have to say about these new calls for group rights (some of which draw inspiration from his 1982 book) and about conservative criticisms of them? Yet again, almost nothing. Many of the critics seem to be motivated not so much by their professed attachment to individual rights as by a desire to defend certain features of traditional racial and gender orders that group rights threaten to transform. Given the turn to the right over the past two decades, I cannot share Sandel's undefended assurance that America's traditional exclusionary and inegalitarian senses of community and citizenship need not be much feared today (321). Sandel gives so little attention to American conflicts over racial and gender issues, as well as related issues of immigration, religion, and civic education, and he generalizes so misleadingly from his scant evidence, that his analysis cannot be taken as an adequate account of the sources or problems of community and citizenship in America, past or present. He makes some important contributions to such an account, but not enough to sustain his main claims.

* * *

If these criticisms are at least broadly correct, what are the implications for the philosophical and political lessons Sandel offers at the end of *Democracy's Discontent*?

On a philosophic level, I suggest it is well past time to end debate over conceptions of the self, encumbered or unencumbered. We must instead focus on the task to which Sandel rightly points but which he does not adequately undertake. Theorists must engage in explicit, substantive critical reflection about which notions of identity, obligation, and moral purpose might appropriately be embraced as authoritative by various sorts of people today, situated within the complex heritages, current conditions, and challenges that comprise their lives. Those reflections then should be offered not as unquestionable answers handed down from above but as aids to critical deliberation. American political theorists need to pay particular attention to *non*liberal and *non*republi-

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can traditions that have long been at the margins of political theory but that have been far more central to American political experience.

This approach does not rule out deciding on reflection that some of the understandings available to us represent apprehensions of universal moral truths. It rather means that our route to those truths, if we find them, must be one of ascent from a detailed appreciation of the ways our traditions have also been particular and historical, whatever transcendent insights we may deem them to contain. We should no longer begin inquiry by constructing highly abstract principles, scenarios, or hypothetical conditions and then seeking to derive from them through the use of logic alone what we take to be universal truths. Theory needs to come to grips with historical and empirical realities instead.

Politically, I draw three conclusions from my own efforts to grasp such realities as well as from Sandel's account. First, I agree with Sandel that what he calls voluntarist liberal theories do not provide sufficient answers as to why Americans should feel obligated and motivated to join in collective endeavors of civic improvement. Because of the dangers of past doctrines that have valorized Americans as a divinely chosen or racially superior people, I also agree with him that we are well advised to define American purposes and duties in part by instead stressing the shared historical identity of Americans as members of a distinctive political community. Americans should seek to draw from reflections on their national history, evaluated in light of the best moral understandings that human minds can achieve, a sense of what worthwhile things they can hope to attain collectively that they cannot attain alone. I believe, however, that a fuller sense of that history than Sandel provides, one that attends especially to the problems of racial, gender, and class hierarchy that have been the source of Americans' greatest historical failings, points toward giving efforts to solve those problems much higher priority than Sandel seems inclined to do.

Second, the need for such efforts makes me wary of Sandel's celebration of decentralization and devolution (300, 345–49). Through most of U.S. history, the causes of localism and states' rights have been closely associated with the preservation of local systems of racial, ethnic, economic, and gender subordination. Major transformations have come, insofar as they have come, only with the aid of substantial national action (Klinkner 1999). Perhaps we have reached the point where, as Sandel believes, calls for federalism no longer are coded calls to abandon egalitarian initiatives. But in light of his inattention to the American structures and ideologies of inequality that federalism long pro-

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tected, it is hard to share his faith that this corner has indeed been turned in American life.

Third and correspondingly, although Sandel is quite right to urge us to seek ways of "dispersing" sovereignty amidst a "multiplicity of communities and political bodies," there is more value than he allows in "the cosmopolitan vision" that urges us to reach for a greater sense of "the solidarity of humankind" (345). I cannot deny that cosmopolitan aspirations have a utopian quality about them, and that their too-ardent and premature pursuit can be horribly counterproductive. But as Sandel rightly observes, today the world is predominantly characterized by "resurgent aspirations of subnational groups for autonomy and self-rule," groups that often define themselves in "ethnic, religious, and linguistic" terms (344). In that environment, even as we encourage Americans to think of themselves as a distinctive people with a special history in which they can take pride and find partial guidance, it is also wise not to denigrate too quickly the cosmopolitan moral traditions that have always pointed Americans beyond themselves and their own nation. Yes, if we are to combat intolerant national chauvinism, we probably need a richer sense of the meaningfulness of our political community than much modern liberal theorizing provides. But if that sense is in the end to be truly satisfying and worth defending, it must give prominence to the belief, shared by the greatest of American leaders from Washington to Lincoln to Martin Luther King, Jr., that our commitment to achieve the blessings of liberty ultimately is aimed not only at serving ourselves but at improving the lot of all humanity. Neither intellectually nor morally is there any justification for treating American interests and aspirations as the only ones that finally matter; and even politically, I do not think a public philosophy of being "for ourselves only" can really serve to make civic membership seem truly meaningful in the long run. Only a suitably elevated content can provide the right road out of American democracy's discontents.

NOTES

1. See also Sandel 1996, 65–66: "To question the voluntarist justification of religious liberty is not necessarily to agree with Locke that people never choose their religious beliefs."
2. See Smith 1997, 15. For a discussion of why and how these traditions have lost force in the modern era and evidence of their partial resurgence, see Klinkner 1999.

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3. See, e.g., Antonin Scalia, joined by William Rehnquist and Clarence Thomas, dissenting in *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel Village School District v. Grumet*, 114 S. Ct. 2481 (1994) (accommodations of religion represent "the best of our traditions"); *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675 (1986) (upholding school speech restrictions as instruments to promote "fundamental values necessary to the maintenance of a democratic political system"); *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1986) (private homosexual conduct is not protected, as it is not "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and traditions").

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Tom Hoffman

HUMANISM AND ANTIHUMANISM IN LASCH AND SANDEL

ABSTRACT: *Christopher Lasch's* True and Only Heaven *and Michael Sandel's* Democracy's Discontent *are similarly motivated criticisms of consumer society. However, Lasch identifies the ideals animating American consumer society as stemming from a broader humanist impulse, the roots of which he explores and criticizes. This strategy allows Lasch to place his critique of consumerism alongside criticisms of a full range of humanist ideals. Sandel, who articulates a more narrowly focused criticism of consumer society, never links its underlying imperatives to a broader humanism, thus failing to recognize how his alternative, civic republicanism, might share some of the same problems.*

A prominent theme in social theory since Max Weber's day is the paradoxical predicament of the modern individual: "freed" from traditional theological, moral, and communal authorities, the individual, in fact, remains as unfree as ever. But now the very social structures that helped loosen the hold of traditional authorities—the structures of the market and the bureaucratic state—are themselves felt by the individual to be regimenting and oppressive. Jürgen Habermas (1989) has described the contemporary welfare state in similar terms. The welfare-state project, he argues, is only the latest in a series of Enlightenment-inspired schemes, including successive incarnations of socialism and liberalism, that have all failed to deliver on their promises of individual liberation.

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Tom Hoffman, Department of Political Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405, e-mail thhoffma@indiana.edu, would like to thank Russell Hanson, Jeffrey Isaac, and the editor of *Critical Review* for their helpful comments.

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The welfare state contradicts this promise, Habermas writes, as "an ever denser net of legal norms, or governmental and para-governmental bureaucracies" is unavoidably spread over daily life (ibid., 291). Even its promoters now recognize that it is "not a passive medium with no properties of its own," in that there is a "contradiction between its goal [of opening up arenas of individual self-realization and spontaneity] and its method" (ibid.). Further, the inability of contemporary social theory to discern a convincing route away from the oppressiveness of market and state structures amounts to a "new obscurity" (ibid.).

A similar theme is the shared starting point for Christopher Lasch's *True and Only Heaven* and Michael J. Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent*. In strikingly similar ways, both works recast Weberian despair within the specific context of the growth and development of American consumer society. Lasch proclaims "the characteristic mood of the times" to be "a baffled sense of drift" (1991, 22). Echoing Habermas's charge of theoretical "obscurity," Lasch writes that

> it is the assumption that our future is predetermined by the continuing development of large-scale production, colossal technologies and political centralization that inhibits creative thought and makes it so difficult to avoid the choice between fatuous optimism and debilitating nostalgia. (Ibid., 170)

Likewise, Sandel (1996, 323) writes that

> The liberal self-image and the actual organization of modern social and economic life are sharply at odds. Even as we think and act as freely choosing, independent selves we confront a world governed by impersonal structures of power that defy our understanding and control. . . . We find ourselves overwhelmed as we turn to face the world on our own resources.

Indeed, the "discontent" in the title of Sandel's book refers—in part at least—to this experience of being overwhelmed by impersonal structures of power.

Humanism as a Useful Concept

But from this shared starting point in a Weberian portrayal of recent American society, the two authors ultimately make crucially different

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turns. For Lasch, the solution resides in a wholesale rejection of the values that generate these large social structures. If modern economic and political institutions prove to be overwhelming or oppressive to the individual, then those institutions—and the material benefits and conveniences they provide—must be foregone. For Sandel, however, the answer involves no real rejection of modern economic and political institutions, let alone any sacrifice of the material benefits that flow from them. Rather, the individual citizen must be instilled with a stronger, collective sense of agency—adapted, in other words, to be the master of the social structures that seem so overwhelming under a liberal regime.

While there is some risk of confusion in using the term, I believe that comparing Lasch and Sandel in terms of "humanism"[1] is the best way to fill in the details of the interpretations I have just outlined. While a particular type of humanism is their common target, their respective analyses are distinguished most significantly by much different attitudes toward humanism in general. Using the concept of "humanism" not only reveals the two authors' similarities and divergences, but discloses a gap in Sandel's account: he never stops to ask whether his civic republican project would really result in happiness or contentment—even *if* it were successful in satisfying the deep-seated humanist desires he portrays as driving postwar American public dissatisfaction.

The form of humanism both writers condemn—the individualist humanism that has animated much of American social development during the past 40 or 50 years—expresses itself in attempts to promote individual autonomy and self-realization through collectively supported institutions that are informed by neutralist or minimalist conceptions of the good. Feasible or not, the imperative of this humanism is to distribute to increasing numbers of people the resources and protections taken as likely to contribute to individual human freedom.

Both critics note the circumscribed range of issues addressed by a consumerist political economy. It tends to ignore such problems as the development of individual character—especially regarding fitness for political participation—and how best to protect personal, familial, or local integrity. Sandel, for instance, complains that "beginning in the late New Deal and culminating in the early 1960s, the political economy of growth and distributive justice displaced the political economy of citizenship" (1996, 250). The postwar American debate between the

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left and right thus "revolve[d] around two considerations: prosperity and fairness" (1996, 124). Similarly, for Lasch, the terms of national political debate are shaped by an overarching acceptance of a "distributive view of democracy" (1991, 345), within which, again, differences largely concern such matters as how best to secure prosperity and the relative need for policies promoting redistribution or fairness.

While both authors are clearly on the American left,[2] in neither of the books in question do they show any great enthusiasm for arguing (directly at least) in the voice of the mainstream welfarist left for a more egalitarian distribution of social resources or for the promotion of specifically working-class interests. They remain committed to these goals; however, the burden of their arguments is to question the premises of contemporary American political debate. Both criticize the content of the shared ideal underlying this debate, rather than any perceived failure or unfairness in its realization.

While Lasch understands his target to be more narrowly a belief in the idea of progress, the notions that he puts forth in opposition to it—most especially his call for a sense of "limits"—show that what he is objecting to can be understood along the lines of the concept of humanism as it has been spelled out here. If humanism is understood, roughly, as a deep confidence in humankind's ability to know and control its environment, then its identity with what Lasch prefers to call a belief in progress can be seen in some of the attributes Lasch associates with that belief, such as its "insatiability of curiosity and desire" (1991, 528) and its assumption that the advent of "economic abundance gave mankind mastery over its own destiny" (ibid., 121).

Like Lasch, Sandel dissents from this kind of confidence in human power and control—but only when it is vested in the individual citizen. Sandel maintains an unquestioning confidence in our power to know and control our environment and our destiny when this power is vested in a collective political agent. Indeed, his fundamental argument for the superiority of republicanism over liberalism rests on his belief that republicanism—unlike liberalism—*successfully* delivers human mastery. Sandel's central notion of a "formative" collective project, for instance, highlights his confidence in the ability of a polity to control the most important of its environments—the moral and social environment that constitutes its citizens' characters—through self-conscious political debate among the citizenry.

In some respects, though, the authors of *Democracy's Discontent* and *The True and Only Heaven* take the same approach to dealing with the

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problems they identify. Both retrace the steps by which America's consumer society arose, searching for eclipsed ideals that might form the basis of a critical perspective and a viable alternative. Both look to history for inspiration to dissipate the contemporary "obscurity"; and in doing so, both identify as exemplars many of the same producerist and republican social and intellectual movements. Lasch's populist dissent from the idea of progress, and Sandel's civic-republican opposition to liberal proceduralism, are both, at heart, protests against the effects of twentieth-century America's valorization of individual choice and power.

There is a great overlap, then, between the problems these writers set for themselves, the methods they use, and—superficially—the alternatives they propose. In fact, though, their respective answers differ fundamentally. While both Lasch and Sandel attack the ideal driving American consumerism—the ideal of *individualist* humanism—only Lasch proceeds to extend this critique to the humanist impulse more generally. Because Lasch's critique peers more deeply into the motivations beneath contemporary consumerism, he must wrestle with the question of whether *any* expression of human autonomy, freedom, and power is likely to result in happiness.

Sandel's analysis, on the other hand, merely seeks to redirect the humanist impulse from its individualistic focus in modern consumerism to a more collective level, without ever seriously raising the question of its relationship to human happiness. Producerist and republican strains in U.S. history are identified by both authors as providing the basis for an answer to the deficiencies they find in contemporary society, but for Lasch it is producerism's sense of limits—which amounts to a rejection of humanism—that recommends itself. For Sandel, by contrast, producerism is attractive precisely because of its (purportedly) superior ability to enhance human agency. "Democracy's discontent" refers, Sandel writes, to "the fear that, individually and collectively, we are losing control of the forces that govern our lives," along with "the sense that, from family to neighborhood, to nation, the moral fabric of community is unraveling around us. These two fears—for the loss of self-government and the erosion of community—together define the anxiety of the age" (1996, 3). Together they produce, he maintains, a widespread perception of a "loss of mastery."

By contrasting Sandel's civic republicanism with Lasch's differing attitude, I hope to raise a basic question about Sandel's vision: namely,

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would a civic-republican public philosophy really make Americans less discontented—that is, happier? Instead of asking this question, Sandel labors to portray liberal consumerism as a public philosophy that generates discontentment, and then goes some way toward describing how his alternative republicanism might prove better than liberalism at providing a sense of autonomy or mastery for its citizens. The crucial final link in the argument is left undeveloped: nowhere in *Democracy's Discontent* does Sandel explain how or why a sense of collective mastery is likely to prevent the discontent of individual citizens, or how it will make individuals happier. This is where Lasch's work is especially instructive. A central—perhaps *the* central—message of *The True and Only Heaven* is to warn against any complacency concerning the connection between attempts at mastery and the achievement of human happiness. This kind of complacency, according to Lasch, is a damaging—if pervasive—form of modern arrogance.

Sandel's failure to question the assumption that republican freedom will lead to happiness is akin to the widespread assumption on the part of liberals that individualist freedom will result in happiness.[3] Sandel—like Lasch—is quick to point out that happiness has not resulted despite the best efforts to date of an individualist form of humanism. It is striking, therefore, that he does not stop to consider his own prescription's ultimate connection with happiness.

It might be thought that Sandel's answer to this question is implied in the solution he offers for the second of the two basic anxieties he describes: the concern about an unraveling of community. But by interrogating this theme of Sandel's book in terms of happiness, we will find that he provides no answer here either. I will argue that what Sandel is trying to address here is the problem of perceived moral chaos, a fear of moral anarchy. But the kind of civic republicanism he embraces as a solution—which is pluralistic so as to avoid the charge of coerciveness traditionally associated with republicanism—turns out to be an impotent remedy for such moral chaos. Thus, it would be wrong to assume that his republicanism is linked to happiness through its ability to reduce the anxiety or discontent caused by moral fragmentation. While Sandel's republicanism may avoid coerciveness, and may also avoid the fatuous nostalgia Lasch identifies with communitarianism (1991, ch. 3), it would merely move moral fragmentation and conflict to a more public and fully collective level—if anything, intensifying its effects.

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Sandel and the American Quest for Mastery

Examining the argument in *Democracy's Discontent* in terms of humanism as it has been spelled out here means focusing particular attention on the central role of "mastery"—or the perceived loss of it—in Sandel's account of American political life. According to Sandel, the reigning liberal public philosophy has nothing to say about the dual anxieties beneath the discontent currently besetting American democracy. His analysis indicates that, in fact, it is the ascendance of a liberal public philosophy that has generated these anxieties in the first place, fueling the growing sense of lost mastery. The republican alternative is (Sandel argues) equipped to re-engender a sense of mastery on the part of the public, answering its pervasive discontent. It is on this claim that his case for embracing a version of civic republicanism ultimately rides.

In the two parts of his book, Sandel successively narrates liberalism's eclipse of civic republican values in constitutional law and of republican concerns in debates over political economy. In both of these cases, the triumph of procedural or neutralist liberalism over its civic rival is achieved by harmfully bracketing off the most important substantive issues from the political realm. Political judgments about morality are suppressed in an attempt to liberate the individual. With the minimal proviso that each individual must extend to others a similar toleration, the liberal republic attempts to extend procedural protections and material resources and opportunities to each individual in an attempt to make each morally sovereign.

The public philosophy of liberalism has at its heart an understanding of human freedom as "the capacity of persons to choose their values and ends" (Sandel 1996, 5). The republican alternative, by contrast, Sandel tells us, is founded on a notion of "freedom as self-rule" (ibid., 6) in the collective sense—that is, it "depends on sharing in self-government" (ibid., 5). Such sharing, in turn, depends on successfully inculcating certain habits or traits of collective decision making. This inculcation Sandel terms variously "the formative project" or "the formative ambition."

According to Sandel, the liberal and republican traditions

> assess political institutions by asking different questions. The liberal begins by asking how government should treat its citizens, and seeks principles of justice that treat persons fairly as they pursue their various interests and ends. The republican begins by asking how citizens

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> can be capable of self-government, and seeks the political forms and social conditions that promote its meaningful exercise." (Ibid., 27)

Thus, Sandel contends, the liberal philosophy, which views "citizens first and foremost as objects of treatment"[4] rather than as "agents of self-rule," effectively concedes "from the start a certain disempowerment, or loss of agency" (ibid.).

For example, discussing what he takes to be the influence of liberal procedural thinking on the U.S. Supreme Court's First Amendment jurisprudence, Sandel notes a "shift from self-government to self-expression" (ibid., 80) as the basis for the right to freedom of speech. This shift, he argues, is a "particular case of a more general principle of respect for persons as independent selves, capable of choosing their values for themselves" (ibid.).

> But the discontent that besets American public life today illustrates the inadequacy of this solution. A politics that brackets morality and religion too completely soon generates its own disenchantment. Where political discourse lacks moral resonance, the yearning for a public life of larger meaning finds undesirable expression. (Ibid., 322)

By attempting to respect—or empower—individuals as sovereign moral agents, liberal proceduralism leaves them isolated, alone and unfulfilled. And, so, while a "voluntarist conception of freedom that inspires this liberalism holds out a liberating vision, a promise of agency that could seemingly be realized even under conditions of concentrated power" (ibid, 278), the reality fails to deliver. Although Sandel does not provide any additional evidence for the claim, his argument seems to be that neutralist liberal practices are psychologically unstable. An apparently irrepressible "yearning for a public life of larger meaning" can only lead either to "narrow, intolerant moralisms" or to a tabloidized version of the public sphere (1996, 322) once the "procedural republic" of liberalism has closed off genuinely republican alternatives.

In *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), Sandel had developed a technical philosophical argument about agency that clearly undergirds the cultural, legal, and historical claims of *Democracy's Discontent.* As in more recent work, Sandel's first book faults liberalism for failing to deliver on its humanist promises. Or as Sandel puts it in the closing paragraph of *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, liberalism fails by "putting the self beyond the reach of politics," thus making "human agency an article of faith rather than an object of continuing attention and con-

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cern, a premise of politics rather than its precarious achievement" (1982, 183). Since Sandel's argument in the later book omits an account of precisely why an individualist moral order is psychologically unsatisfying, or how a collective construction of agency might be more satisfying, we might expect to find the missing arguments in *Limits*. But while the earlier volume does contain a more precise elaboration of the kind of human agency Sandel proposes, there is little, if any, attempt to link it (psychologically, philosophically, or otherwise) with happiness.

Sandel does argue that his notion of agency—an agency that is a combination of both will (choice) and self-reflection upon the given, socially created constituents of the self—provides a better context for individual choice or judgment. This form of agency, he argues, allows the individual to make choices that "are not arbitrary in the same way" as the choices of a liberal, unencumbered self (1982, 180). An individual can assess the appropriateness of any particular desire, for instance, based on the intersubjective sense of the good that she recognizes as constitutive of herself. Perhaps the presence of such a framework for prioritizing desires—what Charles Taylor has called "inescapable (moral) horizons" (1991, ch. 4)—is what is needed to banish psychological discomfort. Still, arbitrariness would, in fact, remain[5] (or at least the *perception* of it would),[6] since Sandel is unwilling to propose that any single set of collective moral horizons be treated as authoritative, and because he allows some choice on the part of the self-reflecting individual concerning which aspects of one's socially constructed self (one's moral "inheritance") one embraces as truly constitutive.

In any case, what Sandel does say in *Limits* effectively endorses a radicalization of humanism. Conscious human control is to be exerted not just over ends (understood as alienable from the self) and other "external" aspects of the environment, but also over the deepest constitutive or "internal" elements of the self—elements not even recognized under a liberal conception of agency, according to Sandel. The fact that this would be a collective form of humanism—a drive for knowledge and control that operates through collective rather than individual deliberation—does not lessen the fact that it is, in fact, a type of humanism.

In the social history presented in *Democracy's Discontent*, we are told that the experience of the postwar economic boom[7] forestalled the American public's perception of a loss of control for decades after the ideological tide had decisively turned toward a consumerist public philosophy. However, in 1968, "America's moment of mastery expired" (1996, 294–95). Since then, the fortunes of specific American political

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figures—and, thus, the dynamic of the nation's politics itself—have reflected the public's anxiousness to regain a sense of mastery or control. The travails of the Carter administration, for instance—the Iranian hostage crisis and the failed rescue mission—"seemed to confirm yet again, that a nation accustomed to mastery had lost control of its destiny" (ibid., 308); thus, Carter left office discredited. Reagan's popular appeal, meanwhile, was based on his (fraudulent, according to Sandel) ability to evoke a return to mastery: the Reagan campaign "above all was all about mastery, all about countering the sense of powerlessness that afflicted the Carter presidency" (ibid., 311).

Sandel's verdict on Carter's infamous "malaise speech"—a speech purportedly written in consultation with Lasch[8]—is telling. The address, while "a cogent statement of the discontent that had been building for over a decade," is faulted by Sandel for failing to provide any real answers to the problem of lost mastery and for relying instead on mere exhortation to have "faith" (1996, 307–308). To the extent that the speech was inspired by Lasch, it is not surprising that Sandel would find in it no feasible road map toward mastery. For Lasch, unlike Sandel, is skeptical about the desirability of such a humanist project.

The route to mastery, Sandel says, is to exert human choice and control collectively and politically, not individually and privately. To do so we must embrace the formative project of civic republicanism, consciously seeking to create fit political actors, citizens who are comfortable participants in collective decisionmaking. The goal is political agents who are willing and able to coordinate their wills, and who are attached to a common understanding of the good. This sense of the common good should guide all their political actions (ibid., 5).

By creating citizens with a deep sense of—and love for—the common good, Sandel's collectivist humanism would seem well positioned not only to reassert human control over the large social structures that mark modern American life, but also to restore in its individual members a powerfully reassuring sense of community and moral context. Even if the former achievement failed to deliver happiness as a side effect, perhaps the latter might. In other words, the roots of the present discontent may lie less in a perceived loss of control and more in a sense of moral anarchy or loss of shared values.

As in the account of agency spelled out in *Limits*, however, in *Democracy's Discontent* Sandel seems unwilling to leave behind large chunks of liberalism—notably a foundational skepticism, a tolerance for pluralism,

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and an acceptance of some measure of individual choice of ends. In the civic republicanism that he endorses, the common good is not assumed to be unitary and incontestable—as it had been in older, coercive forms of republicanism (ibid., 319ff.). Sandel (rightly, in my view) is explicitly unwilling to purchase collective mastery or an unclouded sense of community at the cost of abandoning moral pluralism. But by flinching here, Sandel renders his position a non-answer to the concern about moral chaos—that is, the anxiety about the sense of lost community and a rent moral fabric.

Indeed, Sandel's formative project can be seen as a sort of "procedural republicanism" in which citizens are habituated to political contestation, but in which only a minimalist or neutralist conception of the common good is authoritatively instilled. This avoids coerciveness. Presumably, though, these newly minted citizens would exercise their public skills in the service of the full range of commitments, or understandings of the good, that currently seem so incommensurable and disorienting. There would likely be as much moral fragmentation as exists under contemporary liberalism, only the stakes would be raised. All the most important sources of meaning and commitment for individuals would be loaded onto the political stage, and—if anything—a stronger sense of selflessness in the service of these values would make particular actors more willing to engage in extreme acts in the promotion of their causes.[9]

Finally, it seems unlikely that individuals would identify with—and, thus, gain satisfaction from—political outcomes that diverged from the notions of the common good to which they are committed. To the extent that they did not—to the extent that they felt that the values constituting their identities had publicly lost out—they would probably feel less mastery and contentment, not more. Certainly, a formative project along the lines of Sandel's would concentrate on instilling a powerful sense of commitment to procedural political norms. Citizens would be consciously formed so as to feel constrained by principles limiting them to the use of fair or mutually acceptable political tactics, and to accept specific political setbacks. Still, given human experience to date, it seems reasonable to at least question whether such procedural commitments—no matter how strongly reinforced—would stand up to the potentially contrary pull of truly substantive moral-political commitments. Sandel entertains none of these concerns and fails to consider the possibility that any or all of them may prevent a civic republican polity from making its citizens happier or less discontented.

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Lasch: Populist, Not Civic Republican

In *The True and Only Heaven*, Lasch presents the reader with something that is "not so much an intellectual tradition as a sensibility" (1991, 17). The sensibility of populism is distinguished mostly in the negative, by what it opposes: the prevailing humanist currents in modernity that remain confident of the possibilities of indefinite progress and improvement in human life. While described as "the conscience of the lower middle class" (ibid.), Lasch identifies elements of this dissenting sensibility in the work of a remarkably diverse range of social and religious thinkers. Many of the figures Lasch draws upon are contributing members of traditions distinct from populism—syndicalism, liberalism, and even civic republicanism—who nonetheless articulate "populist" themes, perhaps most poignantly during moments of doubt. He acknowledges, for instance, that his account of nineteenth-century populism in part "builds on the work of J.G.A. Pocock, Gordon Wood and other historians of the republican tradition" (ibid., 15).[10]

This is among the reasons that Lasch's populism bears a rather complicated relationship to civic republicanism. At a deep level, he believes, the populist worldview diverges from republicanism, even while the two have overlapped in some instances and have often been allied against the dominant ideology of progress. The liberal tradition is built around a notion of the possibilities of material progress, abundance, and consumer choice. According to Lasch the republican tradition, too, is implicated in a desire for human control, but in another guise.

Nonetheless, Lasch typically has good things to say about thinkers in the republican tradition. The reasons for this are somewhat puzzling, but his discussion of Machiavelli's republicanism (ibid., 49–52) may be instructive. Lasch endorses the acceptance by Machiavelli and his Renaissance peers of the ultimate power of fate—or *fortuna*—over human affairs. While a form of humanism, Renaissance republicanism was one version (unlike modern humanism, Lasch seems to believe) that still recognized limits.

The republican tradition in general also has reasons to commend itself to Lasch, particularly as an individual ethos. Considered from the individual citizen's perspective—though not from the perspective of the polity—the republican ideal does involve an acceptance of limits to one's sovereignty. Lasch (ibid., 50–51) notes that because the civic ideal has often defined itself in opposition to Christianity,

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> it is easy to miss their underlying affinity. . . .There was a world of difference, to be sure, between a community of saints and a community of virtuous citizens, but the two concepts, virtue and grace, "found common ground," in Pocock's words, "in an ideal of austerity and self-denial." The belief in progress carried with it a very different ideal of the good life.

However, civic republicanism promotes self-denial only in the name of a larger humanist aspiration, not for deeper spiritual or metaphysical reasons or even in the name of individual happiness. Lasch (1991, 173) notes, for example, that the republicans' notion of virtue—in contrast to the populists'—is grounded in "self-assertion and self-realization, not self-abnegation." This fact limits the compatibility of republicanism and Lasch's populism.

Populism is a sensibility born out of doubt and a failure of confidence, so it is not surprising that it "offers no panacea for the ills that afflict the modern world" (Lasch 1991, 173). As Lasch argues in conclusion, it "asks the right questions, but it does not provide a ready-made set of answers" (ibid. 532). By looking at some of the questions that it asks, we can soon see the extent to which the republicanism Sandel offers *is* a panacea.

Aside from its deeper questioning of humanist values and their connection to happiness, Lasch's vision also, implicitly at least, takes into account the material sacrifices implied by a rejection of consumerist humanism. Sandel does not. For Sandel the move to redirect political-economic discourse to include civic ends—the addition of the formative project as an important end of the economic order, along with wealth creation and distribution—is an apparently costless one. Nowhere in *Democracy's Discontent* does he hint at—let alone try to assess—any material sacrifice. Perhaps more importantly, he devotes no attention to those character traits—often featured in traditional forms of republicanism—that support the frugality or austerity of the individual lives required by systems that demand significant time and attention for the cultivation of political life. Thus, for example, while Sandel (1996, 318–21) is explicit about his disavowal of Rousseau's unitary conception of the common good, he simply fails to consider anything like Rousseau's psychology of individual dedication and material self-restraint—aspects of the tradition of republicanism likely to be as alien and disconcerting to prevailing contemporary tastes as the rejection of moral pluralism.

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Lasch turns to themes in Protestant thought, along with the anti-luxury themes of the republican tradition that go largely unnoted by Sandel, to develop a rather bracing ethic of austerity. This ethic is consistent with a rejection of individualist humanism—and in Lasch's case, with a rejection of humanism altogether. While it may be unrealistically demanding, the idea of a "spiritual discipline against resentment" (Lasch 1991, ch. 9) articulates the kind of personal ethic likely to be required of citizens in a society that has largely abandoned both the overwhelming social structures of humanism and the material comforts and conveniences provided by them. Lasch is explicit and realistic about the costs of his rejection of individualist humanism—even if it may be unrealistic to expect contemporary citizens to accept such costs. Unlike Sandel, Lasch asks—in detail—what a rejection of consumerism would really require of individuals. "Populists" must, he argues, never forget

> the habits of responsibility associated with property ownership; the self-forgetfulness that comes with immersion in some all-absorbing piece of work; the danger that material comforts will extinguish a more demanding ideal of the good life; the dependence of happiness on the recognition that humans are not made for happiness. (Ibid., 16)

For Lasch, these "truths" are more than just the prerequisites, at the level of individual character development, of a rejection of consumerism. They articulate multiple aspects of the sensibility he thinks crucial to happiness in any society. A collectivist quest for power or mastery—like an individualist one—would distract humanity from the quiet cultivation of a way of life based on these truths. By holding out the promise of human mastery, Sandel's republicanism—just like individualist humanism—would encourage the optimism that Lasch describes as "a higher form of wishful thinking" (1991, 530), and which he sees as so destructive to human contentment because so easily devastated by the inevitable setbacks reality deals to human design.

* * *

As one critic has said, Lasch's basic message—communicated in *anti*-modernist terms—echoes some *post*modern voices in proposing that "the problem of our time is humanism—a nihilistic faith in human power that underwrites the subjection of otherness" (Isaac 1992, 84). But this critic contends that Lasch goes too far, that he confuses a recognition of human limitedness with a belief that those limits are

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good—that they "accord with some mysterious properties of the universe that we cannot understand and to which we should thus submit" (ibid., 94).

Considering Lasch's discussions of Martin Luther King, Reinhold Niebuhr (1991, ch. 9), and earlier Protestant thinkers (ibid., ch. 6), this seems a valid criticism. Lasch, for instance, reports approvingly of King sermonizing about "the rightness of a world full of unmerited hardship" (ibid., 392) and of Thomas Carlyle's Puritan-influenced recognition of "the sinfulness of man's rebellion against . . . limits" (ibid., 240).

Related to this occasional tendency to confuse "is" with "ought"—and to seemingly impute a cosmic imprimatur to the fact of human limitedness—is what another critic has termed the "Protestant parochialism" (Lears 1995, 48) of Lasch's response to those limits. This might best be seen in Lasch's return, again and again, to a Calvinist-like fixation on the value of the work ethic as the route to self-abnegating happiness. It can rightly be asked whether any other practices or states of mind could not be understood as potential routes away from humanism (and, thus, to happiness)—even, perhaps, some consumption-based forms of self-forgetfulness, the likes of which Lasch seems completely unwilling to consider.

In defense of Lasch, however, there is a deep ambivalence in his stance toward human limits. The whole of his distinction between "hope"—a chastened, realistic aspiration for human happiness—and "optimism"—a hubristic demand for happiness on humanity's terms—is premised on his concern to articulate the prerequisites for human happiness in the here and now, not necessarily to demand humanity's acceptance of the truth of Protestant theology for its own sake. He retains a kernel of humanism in his own concern to explore the possibility that humanity might be able to know itself and its (imperfect) condition well enough to come to an acceptance and a kind of hopeful happiness. Thus, he manages to move beyond the confines of his own Protestantism and his Protestant sources to express a more broadly generalizable insight.

One need not go all the way with Lasch, then, to accept his point that the route from humanism to happiness is too complex to be merely assumed. In making this point, it seems to me, Lasch exposes a link between the widespread embrace of humanist values and the tendency in modern political thought to make human freedom intrinsically valuable rather than a means to happiness (Friedman 1994), or to

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fail to ask what freedom is good for. This widespread tendency, shared by liberals, communitarians, and civic republicans of Sandel's ilk, may well stem from a prior unquestioned acceptance of humanism. The important thing is to pause to ask these questions, as Lasch does.

NOTES

1. Of course one might prefer to speak in terms of a drive for human agency or freedom, empowerment, mastery, or—as Lasch put it—a faith in open-ended human progress. "Humanism" seems capable of encompassing all of these. In her survey of the concept, Kate Soper (1986) acknowledges the great variety of meanings denoted by "humanism," and especially the difference in traditions of usage of the concept in Anglo-American versus Continental social thought. However, she concludes that what "lies at the heart of every humanism" is a "profound confidence in our powers to come to know and thereby to control our environment and destiny" (ibid., 16). A philosophy or worldview that asserts this kind of confidence, along with an attendant valorization of human freedom, is what I mean by the term.
2. Although Lasch has sometimes been deemed a "conservative," Ronald Beiner's label of "left-wing conservatism" (Beiner 1997) is probably most apt.
3. Friedman 1994 discusses not only the pervasiveness of this assumption (about the value of individualist freedom) within liberalism, but also—while highlighting the similarities between liberals and their communitarian critics generally—points out that Sandel, too, holds onto this assumption. Indeed, I will argue, this overlap with the assumptions of liberalism surfaces most clearly in Sandel's concern to argue for a noncoercive (read "liberal") form of republicanism—a republicanism that respects pluralism. Sandel's more general argument for the superiority of republicanism to liberalism, however, relies not on the assumed value of individual-level freedom, but on the analogous assumption about the value of collectivist freedom.
4. But this last statement seems an unfair characterization. Civic republicanism could be cast in similar terms as a philosophy that views citizens as first and foremost objects of creation—through the formative project—rather than as agents of self-rule. There is no need for Sandel to deny—as he seems to do here—that the liberal philosophy is about freedom. All he need say is that liberalism, by seeking a flawed (individualist) form of self-rule, soon sinks into treating its citizens as objects.
5. See Friedman 1994, 306–308 for a fuller discussion of how choices made from a Sandelian conception of agency would still, at bottom, remain arbitrary.
6. In truth it is the perception of arbitrariness that is important here. While some illiberal or traditional social orders may be able to impose a single moral code, liberal toleration results in societies marked by moral pluralism, often perceptually a challenge to those who want to believe that one moral order is uniquely metaphysically sanctioned. As Sandel agnostically puts it, when it comes to the

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question of arbitrariness (e.g., of values, or of the nature of selves), ultimately "only theology can say for sure" (1982,180).

7. The notion that economic growth can mask the sense of powerlessness felt by the American public is curious. Since it is the sheer scale of the social institutions confronting the modern individual (such as the market) that supposedly fuels the discontent, it is hard to understand why a period of rapid market expansion would mask rather than aggravate that perception. On the other hand, if economic growth is successful in creating economic contentment, one might wonder about the wisdom of making a concern for citizen formation one of the primary goals of the economic system, given that doing so might hamper economic growth.
8. See Lears 1995, 43 for one account of Lasch's involvement in this 1979 speech.
9. As Stephen Holmes (1993, 180) has warned: "It is much easier to be cruel in the course of acting for the sake of others or for a 'cause,' than while acting for one's own sake." Passionate cruelty can easily follow from a sense that one is acting for the common good, not just for the sake of one's own faction.
10. Lasch (1991, 15) is quick to follow up his acknowledgment of his debt to republicanism with this qualification:

> It is my contention, however, that the concept of virtue, which played such an important part in the nineteenth-century critique of "improvement," did not derive from republican sources alone. Recent scholarship . . . has overlooked the more vigorous concept of virtue that was articulated in certain varieties of radical Protestantism.

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Ryszard Legutko

TOLERATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

ABSTRACT: *By viewing toleration—which is usually interpreted as a personal attitude—through the lens of peaceful coexistence, Michael Walzer links toleration to political arrangements. The consequence of this approach is to blur basic political categories such as the state, political power, culture, and political creed. Moreover, while Walzer clearly prefers an immigrant society as embodying the practice of toleration more fully than any other regime, he fails to identify either its cultural or its political preconditions.*

Contemporary discourse about tolerance is full of paradoxes, of which I will mention only two. The first concerns the concept's apparent simplicity. If we define tolerance, as many writers do, as respect for opinions we dislike, we run into the problem of explaining why we should act against our nature, as it were, and accept what we oppose. This explanation will demand that we resort to such ideas as freedom, equality, autonomy, rights, justice, fairness, and utility. What seemed rather simple is suddenly complicated, and the complexity only increases when we recognize that tolerance, while primarily invoked to function as a minimalist *modus vivendi* among individuals or groups who differ, often irreconcilably, about freedom, equality, autonomy, rights, justice, and so on, is now linked to the very ideas it

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Ryszard Legutko, Institute of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University, Grodzka 52, 31-044 Kraków, Poland, telephone 48-12-4224916, e-mail rlegutko@omp.org.pl, is most recently the author of *Toleration: A Study of Strong Government, Law of Nature, Love and Free Conscience* (ZNAK, 1997) and *Plato's Euthyphro: Translation and Commentary* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998).

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was supposed to rise above. One would be almost tempted to say that tolerance works best when it is pursued without rational reflection; once we begin to think about it, it dissolves into the very conflicts it is supposed to avoid.

The other paradox is that the West has been more and more preoccupied with condemning allegedly ever-more-sinister forms of intolerance, even while from all appearances, tolerance has never been as widely accepted and as deeply rooted in social and political norms as it is today. The struggle to legitimize eccentricity—proclaimed more than 150 years ago by John Stuart Mill and seen henceforth by many as a litmus test of tolerance—has been won, so it is not obvious why we should continue to attribute to tolerance such importance; more and more groups with various cultural, religious, and ideological loyalties are being incorporated into the mainstream of political life, and there is therefore less and less ground for concern that people will remain marginalized as aliens or outsiders for long. The present clamor for toleration thus seems to be out of proportion with the actual state of affairs.

Disregarding these two paradoxes can thwart any attempt to shed light on tolerance by reducing such an effort to a monotonous litany of predictable, philosophically sterile, and politically impotent moral appeals and condemnations.

On Toleration, by Michael Walzer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), seems, at least, to avoid both paradoxes. To sidestep the first one, Walzer speaks of toleration rather than of tolerance: that is, of practice rather than of theory. Whatever theoretical justification it might have, tolerance serves its purpose only as toleration, that is, as social practice, and Walzer points out that different institutional arrangements have allowed different forms of toleration, such that one should not hasten to evaluate them unequivocally in terms of progress (whether he, himself, has managed to take his own advice I will discuss in due course). Regarding the second paradox, Walzer decides to ignore the question of how far we should tolerate individual forms of eccentricity—a question to which all the answers worth pondering have already been given—and concentrate instead on the vital issue of "the peaceful coexistence of groups of people with different histories, cultures and identities" (2); and, specifically, on several "regimes of toleration," that is, several institutional arrangements that have made this coexistence possible, each in a different fashion.

Before considering whether Walzer's approach really does get

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around the paradoxes of his topic, let me take a closer look at some of the ambiguities that pervade his book.

Regimes of Toleration

I will start with what is apparently for Walzer a basic concept—the regime of toleration. He mentions five such regimes: the multinational empire, international society, consociation, the nation-state, and the immigrant society. The word "regime" is here understood in an ordinary sense as a political arrangement that secures internal peace. The five regimes are thus five types of institutional structures that Walzer compares in order to see how they serve the purpose of peace and coexistence, with no intention—at least no explicit intention—of evaluating them on a scale of moral progress.

But here a series of problems emerges. If a regime is a practical arrangement to secure peaceful coexistence, and if toleration is peaceful coexistence, then every regime may be legitimately called a regime of toleration, since a sufficient degree of peaceful coexistence is a prerequisite of any viable set of institutional structures. Such a conclusion, however, would deprive Walzer's category of explanatory value, and would give toleration a meaning we rarely attribute to it. While it is true that speaking of toleration presupposes the peaceful coexistence of individuals and groups, it would be counterintuitive to claim that this coexistence is tantamount to toleration. In studying peaceful coexistence we either stay within the domain of the political and try to determine which institutional structures are most conducive to that end, or we go down to the level of the social and personal and attempt to identify those forms of behavior and those attitudes that precede and, as some might say, condition the functioning of political structures.

From the latter perspective, toleration—a rather mysterious mixture of indifference, calculation, inherited practice, self-interest, ethical education, personal affect, altruistic and communal instincts, social hypocrisy, good manners, and many other elements—would not particularly be determined by political arrangements. Instead, it would tend to determine them.

The ambiguous concept of "a regime of toleration," however, blurs the borderline between the political on the one hand, and the social and psychological on the other. The peaceful coexistence of groups is

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undoubtedly one of the priorities of every well-ordered regime, but toleration never is, never has been, and probably never will be such a priority, the main reason being that if it is defined to include something more than rules of peaceful coexistence, it lies outside the scope of political arrangements. Political structures are about distributions of power, about civic duties, about security and stability, about law and order, while toleration is rather about personal attitudes whose connection with a system of institutions is notoriously unclear. Toleration can never sustain a regime, nor be its foundation. A regime reduced to, or evaluated solely in the light of, toleration would be like an economic system interpreted solely from the point of view of charity, or a system of justice seen solely from the viewpoint of mercy.

Walzer is well aware of the nonpolitical sense of toleration; whenever he discusses toleration without dealing with "regimes" he treats toleration as a state of mind. He enumerates several types of this state of mind. The first is "a resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of peace" (10). This type of toleration—going back to the settlement of religious differences in early modern Europe—is the only one that can, albeit not easily and without troublesome side effects, be linked to political arrangements (separation of church and state, limited government, basic rights, etc.). But there are other states of mind associated with toleration:

> A second possible attitude is passive, relaxed, benignly indifferent to difference: *it takes all kinds to make a world*. A third follows from a kind of moral stoicism: a principled recognition that the *others* have rights even if they exercise those rights in unattractive ways. A fourth expresses openness to the others; curiosity, perhaps even respect, a willingness to listen and learn. And, furthest along the continuum, there is the enthusiastic endorsement of difference: an aesthetic endorsement, if difference is taken to represent in cultural form the largeness and diversity of God's creation or of the natural world; or a functional endorsement, if difference is viewed, as in the liberal multiculturalist argument, as a necessary condition of human flourishing, one that offers to individual men and women the choices that make their autonomy meaningful. (10–11)

It is hard to see how these four forms of toleration can depend on the five institutional arrangements. Take the "liberal multiculturalist argument," for instance. Political structures can prevent certain things

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from happening or, sometimes, facilitate certain actions and processes; they cannot, however, generate enthusiasm toward anything, including themselves. Any attempt to include such enthusiasm among the political objectives induces a totalitarian temptation that will have to be satisfied through psychological, not institutional, programs.

Multiculturalism and Power

The intermingling of the political with the social and psychological gives an ideological tinge to Walzer's argument. Although he explicitly refrains from comparing the regimes, he clearly has sympathy for what he calls the immigrant society, and seems to believe that this is more or less our future. Whether he has been driven to this conclusion by his American experience, or by the ideology of multiculturalism, which he seems at least partly to accept—or by both—I cannot tell. Yet it is obvious that his arguments are largely inspired by multiculturalism, and whenever they fail, they fail because of their multiculturalist underpinnings.

The idea that one can enthusiastically endorse all differences not only runs contrary to human nature, which in this respect is rather selective, but also contradicts the basic standards of epistemology. A person enthusiastic about everything would be considered silly, and with good reason: an ability to discriminate and to evaluate is after all a primary quality of the intellect. Not to mention the fact that whoever is capable of such a strong positive emotion as enthusiasm will probably be also capable of an equally strong negative emotion.

The basic flaw in Walzer's *political* argument is the absence of a positive notion of political power, and hence vagueness about politics and political regimes. For most multiculturalists, political power is either arbitrary and likely to become a tyranny, or it is something that has to do with particular cultural hierarchies. In the first case power is an artificial structure, rather dangerous, an object of constant vigilance because of its tendency to repress and discriminate. In the second case, power is either desired as something that should be given to oppressed groups and communities, or hated as an expression of the dominance of one group or community over another.

The first case—hostility to political power as arbitrary rule—is exemplified in Walzer's description of the toleration in multinational empires:

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> So lonely dissidents and heretics, cultural vagabonds, intermarried couples, and their children will flee to the imperial capital, which is likely to become as a result a fairly tolerant and liberal place (think of Rome, Baghdad, and imperial Vienna, or, better, Budapest)—and the only place where social space is measured to an individual fit. Everyone else, including all the free spirits and potential dissidents who are unable to move because of economic constraint or familiar responsibility, will live in homogeneous neighborhoods or districts, subject to the discipline of their own communities. (16)

This description is one-sided, politically and historically. In no political system is the social space given to lonely dissidents, heretics, and cultural vagabonds a criterion by which one can measure the ability to diffuse conflicts between groups and to secure peaceful coexistence. Besides, in all political systems—nation-states, empires, consociations, and immigrant societies—big cities offer more space for eccentric behavior and unusual aspirations. Neither is it true that all empires enclosed those outside their capital cities within their own communities, nor that stability was maintained by the even-handed rule of the tyrants and, as Walzer writes further on, by the minimal fairness of the law and the imperial bureaucrats. Empires, of course, differed as regards their internal structure, but at least in some of them—Austria-Hungary, for instance—the political sphere was sufficiently large to absorb groups into various forms of government. Bureaucracy had a stabilizing influence as its nature was not national, still less nationalistic, but political and administrative, such that ethnic categories played a less conspicuous role. In other words, in the Austro-Hungarian empire there developed a semi-republican culture, extending over various ethnic and religious groups, and from the central bureaucracy to political parties, courts, and local governments. Other spheres of collective life can also have a supranational character: schools and universities; financial, industrial, and agricultural organizations; clubs; social and cultural associations; etc. All these, far more than the evenhanded rule of the tyrant and the minimal fairness of law, contribute to the more or less peaceful coexistence of groups.

The second case—political power as a form of cultural hierarchy—is exemplified by Walzer's description of the nation-state:

> In nation-states, power rests with the majority nation, which uses the state, as we have seen, for its own purposes. This is no necessary bar to mutuality among individuals; in fact, mutuality is likely to flourish in

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> liberal democratic states. But minority groups are unequal by virtue of their numbers and will be democratically overruled on most matters of public culture. (55)

Walzer presupposes, first, that a nation is a rather homogenous entity that acts "for its own purposes"; and, second, that a political system has no essential qualities by itself, but is subservient to those purposes. Both assumptions go back to the biological concept of a nation that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century and that entailed a vision of history and politics as an endless conflict between nations. Multiculturalism has a similar vision of history and politics, although it no longer employs biological categories, using instead an ideologically malleable concept of culture. The difference between multiculturalists and cultural Darwinists is that the former aim to find a formula for the coexistence of the conflicting communities, whereas the latter never believed this possible.

Most multiculturalists would of course reject, with indignation, the suggestion that they have any links to cultural Darwinists, especially because the latter assume the homogeneity of the community. Yet multiculturalists have to make this assumption implicitly; otherwise, they could not maintain, as Walzer does, that a nation or an ethnic group can use the state for its own purposes. For multiculturalists as for cultural Darwinists alike, in a nation-state the "nation" determines the "state." "Among histories and cultures," Walzer writes,

> the nation-state is not neutral; its political apparatus is an engine for national reproduction. National groups seek statehood precisely in order to control the means of reproduction. Their members may hope for much more—they may harbor ambitions that range from political expansion and domination to economic growth and domestic flourishing. But what justifies their enterprise is the human passion for survival over time. (25)

One must remember that the Darwinist-multiculturalist concept of a nation is not the only one. To the Romantics, for example, who preceded the era of Darwinism and its fascination with biology, the nation was a matter of common political experience rather than of blood and ethnic bonds. This made the division between national groups less tangible and the prospect of national conflicts less imperative. As ethnic homogeneity was not yet a necessary condition of a nation, the concept of nationality had a wide scope, encompassing

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anyone with shared political experience. Poland's greatest national poet could start his major poetic work with the invocation "Lithuania, my fatherland," and nobody ever questioned either his profound Polish patriotism or the sincerity of his Lithuanian nationalism. In a way the relationship between the political and the national was the reverse of the one that was later to be propagated by the Darwinists and multiculturalists. A society became a nation through an experience in political sovereignty, that is, through developing an ability to manage its own affairs; the mere ethnic community of blood, or language, or religion, did not constitute a nation—or to be precise, did not constitute a genuine nation, which in the nineteenth century was labeled "historical." In other words, "historical nations" were also political nations that had made the transition from tribe to state, from traditional to rational, or—in Hegelian jargon—from the particular to the abstract. The state—and thus also the categories of citizenship, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and so forth—abstracted from the particular or the ethnic.

Obviously the Romantics did not invent the concept of a political nation, but continued the tradition of earlier political theory, from Aristotle to Bodin and Hobbes. Their notion of a political community had its own version of toleration which Walzer mentions only *en passant* at the end of his book, but one that is far more in tune with the standard concept of politics than the five states of mind he enumerates.

The political argument for toleration runs: we tolerate people of different religious, ethnic, and cultural identities because we believe they are good citizens and care for, or at least do not threaten, the common good. This very widespread form of toleration differs from metaphysical beliefs in "moral stoicism," "it takes all kinds to make a world," "diversity of God's creation," and "human flourishing." It does not inquire into what goes on in the tolerant person's mind—whether he is or is not enthusiastic, whether he wishes or does not wish to learn from other groups—and it is therefore conducive to peaceful coexistence. It is also rational, in the sense of giving a politically sound reason for tolerating other groups. And finally, it can, and in fact often does, prevail in every type of regime on Walzer's list: in multinational empires, in consociations, in nation-states, and in immigrant societies such as the United States. On the other hand, this version of toleration is consistent with the possibility that a political system as such has a logic of its own that transcends cultures,

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communities, and different institutional arrangements; and that a well-balanced and efficient mechanism of power imposes rules that, in securing coexistence, necessarily limit the degree of toleration, which may sometimes be detrimental to the public peace.

The Immigrant Society

Walzer's sympathy with the immigrant society means, primarily, sympathy with American society. He praises the arrangement of social life in the United States because he believes it to preserve what he approves—a network of communities—and to minimize what he disapproves: the attachment of political structures to national culture and a strong spirit of civic loyalty (Rousseau's "civil religion"). One is tempted to say that what is praiseworthy about the immigrant society is that it is more tolerant and less regimelike than other regimes. Thus, in American society, first of all, "everyone has to tolerate everyone else," and "no group in an immigrant society is allowed to organize itself coercively to seize control of public space" (32). Individuals are free to live in communities they have chosen or have been born into, without fear of being discriminated against by the state or by the majority. Second, the state is neutral between groups and "autonomous in its purposes" (31). Third, Americanism is less imposing and more pluralist than other forms of "civil religion" and "can live fairly comfortably with what might be called alternative civil religious practices among its own participants" (79).

I will not discuss the first point, an empirical diagnosis of contemporary America about which my competence is limited. I will simply report that Walzer worries about individuals' tendency to emancipate themselves from all communities, groups, and cultures. He expresses hope that although increasing individualism or social atomism are legitimate consequences of tolerational practices that have been constitutive of American society, they will not endanger communitarian tendencies that keep people together in common activities and cultural bonds.

Walzer's second thesis, about the American state being neutral, is somewhat peculiar in the context of his overall argument. Following his logic, it is in America that, for the first time in history, the state has not been determined by the nation. Unlike Europe, where political institutions had always been in the hands of a ruling nation that

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used them "for its own purposes," the United States has managed to free its institutions from any ethnic interest. But if Walzer is suggesting that law in America does not favor any ethnic groups whereas law in Europe does, he is making an unfounded accusation against European legal systems. The political institutions of Europe do not discriminate ethnically among their citizens. So perhaps Walzer merely means that political mores have always been—for obvious reasons—more pluralistic in the United States than elsewhere. This does not in any way, however, corroborate Walzer's thesis that the American regime is essentially different from European regimes because, unlike them, it has managed to be ethnically neutral.

Walzer is willing to grant that the American political system was originally a European, even an Anglo-Saxon invention, and he is even willing to grant—despite his sympathies for multicultural curricula—that the American educational system should still be largely based on classical standards, even if enriched by other "perspectives" and "narratives." He never says, however, when the system changed from a European into an American model: that is, at what point European, republican neutrality—which apparently, for Walzer, is only partial and imperfect neutrality—turned into genuine neutrality of the American type. Neither does he specify exactly what generated this change or what specific arrangements were introduced into or subtracted from the old American system to give us the neutral state we have today.

Walzer does mention one symptom of that change: the emergence of "hyphenated or dual identity." He explains that "the hyphen joining Italian-American, for example, symbolizes the acceptance of *Italianness* by other Americans, the recognition that *American* is a political identity without strong or specific cultural claims. The consequence, of course, is that *Italian* is a cultural identity without political claims" (33).

But this is puzzling for at least two reasons. First, it implies that America does not have a *cultural* identity in the sense that there is a German culture, an Italian culture, or a French culture. America is instead a collection of cultures, and what is common to them is said to be without weight. This would mean that whenever an American citizen seeks for culture he turns to that of his ancestors—to the heritage of Italy, France, Germany, Africa—or that he simply chooses whatever suits his taste, because there is nothing in the United States that can satisfy his desire for cultural identification.

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If this is really what Walzer means, he appears to be conflating several different types of "culture": artistic, spiritual, ideological, social, political, anthropological. The culture appealed to by multicultural ideologues and politicians is not the record of the experience of common history that finds expression in literature, mythology, education. It would be strange to suppose that four centuries of American life have produced only political forms of cooperation while leaving the culture of each immigrant group essentially intact. By this supposition, culture is not something that develops autonomously and spontaneously, something that we must accept and respect as given, but rather something that is inextricably linked to groups in their struggle for recognition. In this view, culture, even in its most sublime varieties, is a form of power, an instrument through which a group can impose control over another. Accordingly, ethnic, political, and ideological divisions can be seen as directly corresponding to cultural divisions, with all the ensuing consequences, such as the extreme politicization of education.

In reality, the fact that one is of Italian descent and has, say, a deeper-than-usual affection for the poetry of Dante and Petrarch and for Italian operas, cuisine, and close family relations does not make him an alien to the American culture that has shaped the language, institutions, morality, imagination, aesthetic environment, social practices, and basic categories of discourse in which he and his family have been living for several generations. One might insist that American culture does not exist or is socially and spiritually negligible if one viewed the existence of American culture as an obstacle to toleration. But even if the existence of an American culture were an obstacle to toleration, it would remain a reality in its own right.

The second source of puzzlement in Walzer's statement about "hyphenated identity" is its assumption that "Americanism" is essentially a political notion. Not only, as before, does America alone seem to be political in the proper sense, that is, with a state that is "autonomous in its purposes" rather than being subservient to national objectives. More importantly, one must wonder what "the political" would consist of in an immigrant society, considering that all of the stronger determinants of this category have been consistently described as inimical to toleration. Political Americanism is thus as enigmatic as it is intriguing. It is enigmatic because Walzer does not say what "the political" means to him. It is intriguing because one might suppose that for Walzer a politics that is "autonomous in its purposes" might be, in

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the era of migrations, the common fate of the majority of modern societies.

Unfortunately, the only thing Walzer has to say about the quality of citizenship in the immigrant society is that it is in fact less political and less civic than in Europe. American civil religion (a slightly misleading term because there is nothing religious in it for Walzer) is said to tolerate "alternative civil religious practices among its own participants," which means that in fact political Americanism further recedes from view as it comprises or rather coexists side by side with other political creeds. "The stories and celebrations that go along with, for example, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, or the Fourth of July can coexist in the common life of Irish-Americans, African-Americans, or Jewish-Americans with very different stories and celebrations" (79). This may very well be true, but in that case the civil religion seems to be rather a framework of civil religions than a set of definitive political beliefs or propositions. On closer inspection, it tends to disappear in the same way that American culture disappears in the multiculturalist perspective, giving way to a plurality of cultures.

The essence of American immigrant—i.e., multicultural—citizenship, Walzer tells us, is that, being conducive to toleration, it is not as demanding, not as strict, not as obliging, as classical citizenship. It is "more relaxed" than republican citizenship. What this thing is that becomes "relaxed" we are not told. The only positive content that I can find is that the aim of multicultural citizenship is to lead hyphenated Americans "to understand and admire their own diversity" (75). This tells us nothing about what limits American citizenship sets on toleration to ensure the existence of the political order.

Nor is this rather thin civil religion enough to account for Americans' rather conspicuous pride in themselves, their country, and their laws. But to promote a stronger form of political Americanism would be "an act of intolerance" (79).

* * *

Although Walzer states explicitly that the five regimes of toleration do not form a hierarchy, they obviously do for him. The immigrant society—as he describes it—is more tolerant than other regimes; and one is entitled to conclude that the more toleration, the better; or, in a more complex formula: the more diversified a society is, the more toleration it needs, and the more toleration it has, the better it is.

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Walzer defines toleration as the peaceful coexistence of groups, and more peaceful coexistence is always better than less. If Walzer sees any problems with too much toleration, he does not discuss them. For Walzer, the immigrant society seems to be the only regime of toleration worthy of the name, the only system in which toleration has so much permeated the political and cultural spheres that it has become the ruling principle of culture, and in a way, replaced politics. No political or cultural standard except respect for or endorsement of diversity can be formulated or even properly discussed by Walzer, since such standards would immediately be weakened by the political necessity of toleration. For whatever would lead to intolerance, more toleration is the only morally acceptable remedy.

Walzer turns toleration, a secondary category, into a primary one. It is secondary because it is an attitude—not a regime—that serves to soften a regime that already exists: a state, laws, institutions, mores, rules of coexistence. It may humanize them—sometimes too much, sometimes not enough—but not create them. Nor is their purpose toleration; it is peace, justice, the common good, security, wealth, or something else. Walzer, however, by introducing the notion of the regime of toleration, not only avoids a real discussion of primary ends, but endows toleration with creative powers. His multiculturalist vision of the immigrant society transforms this possibility into a political project that, he claims, is a reflection of today's America (a question on which I suspend judgment).

Toleration in Walzer's immigrant society has become both the end and the means of politics, the subject of education and the objective of education, the content of culture and the form within which it manifests itself, the ruling principle of the society as a whole and the basic article of faith of every citizen. Walzer's toleration becomes so omnipresent and aggressively intrusive that one cannot resist feeling that there is something stifling about it, which—of course—contradicts the very essence of the idea.

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Boris Maizel

THE POSTMODERN IDENTITY OF RUSSIA—AND THE WEST

ABSTRACT: *In contrast to societies where socialization takes place through the transmission of anonymous and hence overpowering traditions, the typical way of socialization for Western people is through productive dialogue guided by the search for objectivity. Postmodernism, however, fosters a form of dialogue in which people should not look for objective knowledge but should simply register their diverse opinions. Just this type of dialogue has been the norm in Russia for centuries. As a result, Russian cultural and political initiative has been dominated by an all-powerful state. In the West, we now witness a similar process, as the culture of nonjudgmental relativism consolidates its dominance over an increasingly postmodern society.*

The modern epoch, with its Enlightenment ideals of objective science, critical philosophy, and realistic art, is over, or at least so it is widely said. Many believe that we are now stepping into a new world without canons, "metanarratives," "master-readings" and other instruments of the old intellectual order: the world of "postmodernity." The question, however, is whether postmodern theories correspond to any reality. The short answer is that, yes, they do correspond to at least one: Russia has always been "postmodern."

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Boris Maizel teaches in the Department of Philosophy, Baruch College of the City University of New York, 17 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10010, telephone (718) 372-1028. This essay is dedicated to E. P.

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Truth-Seeking vs. Talking

All people are interested in gaining access to reality and truthful information. Everyone intends to know what is true, right, and real as opposed to false, wrong, and illusory. This absolutely universal human characteristic may be explained by the fact that the inability to obtain realistic information condemns human beings to death. Even though all the biological functions of the body—including the neurological and perceptive functions—are intact, if one's capacity for sound reasoning and clear understanding is defective, one cannot survive without other people's close attention and painstaking care. It is solely the ability to make the right choice between reality and illusion, truth and falsehood that is both our generic trademark and our personal license for life.

But cultures differ in how they promote objective knowledge and encourage people in their everlasting search for truth. Some societies institutionalize the search for objective knowledge as a social norm: they demand that their members always be critical, and self-critical, in the pursuit of truth. Other cultures are not so rigorous and do not explicitly emphasize objectivity as a supreme social value.

In most cultures, the question of what is true and false, right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and sinful is answered by reference to a canon of mythology, religious scripture, or theoretical speculation. These intellectual guides are ritualistically transmitted from generation to generation as sacred.

Two cultures are exceptions to this rule: that of the West and that of Russia. If we ask people of these cultures what is right, good, or true, they commonly answer: let us talk and we will see.

The method of the "open cultural answer" was invented by the Greeks and became firmly established as a standard intellectual procedure in post-Renaissance Europe. Independently, a "culture of talk" was developed in Russia, which was virtually isolated from the rest of the world for its entire history.

But Western discussions and Russian dialogues are essentially dissimilar from each other.

In the West, there is an overarching cultural mechanism that provides a controlling and guiding device for all types of debate. This device, however, is not identical with the "metanarratives" (the authoritative stories or myths) that, in other cultures, regulate intellec-

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tual discourse and social life. Western culture does not rest upon a particular sacred text; rather, it adheres to a single anti-authoritarian instruction: "Critically investigate any claim about objective reality." This dictum is applicable to legal, moral, and political debate as well as to journalistic and scientific research.

Western history has not produced a ready-made definition of "objectivity"; instead, people are urged to produce objective information on their own, using their critical, creative, argumentative, and discursive capacities. I call this approach the "philosophical culture" since ancient Greek philosophy prototypically initiated it.

Western dialogue is a public debate concerning momentous issues that is often framed by strict procedures. Though discussions in Western parliaments, universities, and mass media are far from being perfectly and completely honest and unbiased, they are culturally set up to arrive at definite conclusions. With that end in view, the disputatious parties are always rushing to bring forth evidence that exposes their opponents' stands as *objectively* wrong. As this inquisitive procedure became customary, it produced several concomitant traditions: intellectual freedom, liberal democracy, and respect for independent opinions.

In Russia, as was made particularly clear by the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, the cultural norm is for people to talk endlessly and aimlessly, while not listening to each other, in the chaotic manner of a carnival. This form of dialogue is not a pastime in Russia but the only available instrument of social contact, whether privately staged (as with notorious alcoholic binges) or sanctioned by the state (official festivities and hollow political ceremonies).[1]

Carnivalesque Russian dialogue has given rise to an idiosyncratic society. Since a Russian dialogue is not supposed to lead to definite conclusions, its cultural function differs from that of a Western dialogue. The real purpose of Russian dialogues is not learning other people's ideas and not even persuading others of one's rightness, but simply confronting each other. This permanent and rather hostile confrontation makes social cooperation difficult.

Having no impersonal, intersubjective standard of knowledge, Russians typically indulge their subjectivity. "The kind of debate that is usually conducted *between* individuals in the West often rages even more acutely *within* individuals in Russia" (Billington 1966, ix). As Nicholas Berdyaev (1990, 268) put it, "Russian moral judgments are determined with reference to the person, not to the abstract princi-

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ples of property, state, nor to the abstract good. Russians have a peculiar attitude to sin and crime; there is pity for the fallen and the humiliated and dislike for grandeur."

In Russia there are many small islands of community life. But they are communities of family and close friends bound together only by blood ties and personal attachment, not by principles or ideology. Unlike communities that are formed either around a specific civic ideal (religious, moral, social) or around a clearly articulated economic interest, Russian comradeships are casually formed and are bereft of any common basis for mutual trust. Consequently, Russian communities are unable to produce a civil society at large.

Russians sometimes realize the sterility of their type of cultural interaction. But this realization never leads to a more productive form of dialogue. History inexorably reveals another pattern: to preserve a modicum of social cohesiveness, Russians willingly give up their "culture of talk" for the practicality of totalitarianism. A Western historian keenly identified this cultural pattern in Stalin's rise to power: one "factor explaining the compliance of the party's lower echelons to manipulation by the Stalin machine," he writes, was "the widespread disquiet over public displays of disunity and the sense that it was pathological . . . for party meetings and media to be constantly taken up with conflicts of policy and personality" (Rigby 1977, 71).

Russian social diversity does not lead to greater tolerance. On the contrary, Russian society becomes prey to forced and total uniformity. Since it has no regulative mechanism in and of itself, the government imposes its own indisputable order on all branches of public life and even infringes upon Russian private lives. The monotony of political totalitarianism is the permanent underside of superficial cultural flamboyance.

To illustrate my assertion concerning the postmodern character of Russian society, I would like to give examples from three spheres of Russian social life: law, politics, and economics.

Concrete Postmodernism

Russian society may be characterized as lacking a continuous legal tradition and the basic concept of law.

In Russia, Roman law was never adopted as the foundation of civil society, as it was in Western Europe. Nor was the Napoleonic Code,

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the most universal formulation of civil law, the model for Russian justice. At the same time, Russia failed to produce a common-law judiciary.

Even the Russian bureaucracy, which is the only structure in Russia capable of settling disputes and prosecuting crimes, has no uninterrupted tradition of administering justice. Russian law was formed and administered by the arbitrary rule of the almighty Russian autocrats. Many detailed instructions that strictly determined the economic, political, and civil life of Russian subjects relied not on any tradition but completely depended on the will (and whims) of an individual ruler.

The next example is from the sphere of politics. Everywhere politics is an ideological pursuit. In this sense, "ideology" is a concatenation of principles that ruling elites more or less consistently try to put into practice. Although each nation has its own spectrum of ideologies, some ideological underpinning is a common feature of political life in all societies.

Yet James Billington (1966, 217) noted that Catherine the Great was "the only articulate ideologist to rule Russia between Ivan IV and Lenin." The historical interval between the death of Ivan the Terrible (1584) and Lenin's revolution (1917) covers nearly three and a half centuries and would seem too long to contain only one ruler who could articulate an ideology. Even Billington's assessment of Ivan the Terrible and Catherine the Great, however, is questionable. The Russian-American historian Georgiy Fedotov (1989, 203), in a 1945 essay, wisely observed the difference between a Russian ruler and an Oriental despot: "An Oriental despot, who is not limited by law, is confined to a tradition, especially a religious one." But a Russian autocrat is never confined to any ideological tradition.

The avoidance of ideological constraints benefits the government since it allows Russian rulers not to explain their actions or inaction. Thus they are in a position to pursue any policy without a justification and sometimes even without an announcement. "Mr. Gorbachev's achievement," a Western journalist observed, "is a perfect instance of the post-modern as defined by Lyotard: 'The text he writes or the work he creates is not in principle governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged according to a determinant judgment, by the application of given categories to this text or work'" (Atlas 1995, 5).

Never consistently formulated, the policies pursued by different

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Russian leaders are largely similar to each other: all of them essentially seek to maintain the status quo. The difference in policies really concerns only administrative methods and bureaucratic forms, not political goals or ideological content. The real question is, most often, whether to exert more or less pressure on society to conserve it; that is, simply put, whether to make the Russian autocratic regime more or less rigid.

The legitimacy of the Russian government is also uniquely nonideological. Despite their enormous political might, autocratic Russian rulers constantly feel that their power is not ideologically (legally and morally) justified. In fact, Russian history informs us of the almost permanent threat posed by political impostors (the "false czars") who competed for power with official leaders on equally nonideological ground (notably, among them were not only members of the nobility but illiterate peasants such as Pugachev, Razin, and Bolotnikov). Ideological illegitimacy is the main reason Russian rulers tend to intensify political struggle even when absolute power is already in their hands. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Stalin, and practically all other Russian leaders used the full weight of their sophisticated repressive apparatuses to strike preventive blows against potential and even imaginary claimants to the throne.

The third example concerns the applicability of the capitalist system to Russia.

Capitalist societies combine market practices and the "philosophy of greed" with other, sometimes even opposite, cultural mechanisms and values.

Capitalism was created by the Renaissance spirit of innovation and exploratory adventurism. Its critical moral and legal components were supplied by the Protestant and, to a lesser extent, Jewish religions (so argued Max Weber and Werner Sombart). Aristocratic and peasant ideologies were permanent companions to capitalism until the twentieth century. The working class culturally counterbalanced bourgeois civilization. And finally, in some non-Western regions capitalism was in a symbiotic relationship with local cultural traditions.

Russia alone, due to its deficiency of well-embedded political principles and legal norms, has developed a system of chemically pure "economic" capitalism without a cultural backstop, so that capitalism in Russia turned out to be an entirely unlawful and criminal enterprise.

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The Historical Continuity of Russian Postmodernism

Lyotard (1984, xxiv) has defined the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives." Exactly this posture was always appropriate in Russia, for no abstract rule or formal procedure was ever honored there. Ernest Gellner (1979, 346) formulates the "Russian tradition" in the following way: "If the ruler is good, procedures are quite redundant, and indeed offensive; if he is evil, they will not save you." As Geoffrey Hosking (1997) has lately demonstrated, Russia is a nation without the concept of nationhood, where public affairs are not close to its people's hearts and patriotism is never a popular idea.

It was always up to the ruler to decide singlehandedly major political, economic, administrative (including the order of succession to the throne), and even religious and cultural questions. This czar's prerogative was not a remnant of the old customary law: the autocratic principle was fully developed and universally applied by Peter the Great in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries, destroying the scanty autonomy the Russian nobility had enjoyed over the previous centuries and eliminating the residual signs of the rather imaginary independence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Church was subordinated to the Russian state at least from the time of Metropolitan Iosif Volotsky (the fifteenth century). More important, however, while Russian Orthodoxy became world famous for its splendid rituals and its unique religious art, it never developed any significant body of theology. No system of ethics or religious philosophy was produced in Russia until the nineteenth century. "If a historian of Western medieval thought addressed the Russian Middle Ages, he would be stunned by the complete absence of needs and interests in the theoretical justification and in the analysis of faith and church teaching" (Shpet 1991, 260). This is why the Orthodox religion was unable to be the intellectual center of Russian culture and society.

The case of secular philosophy in Russia is even worse than the case of religion. Many cultures possess abstract cosmologies and ethical systems that, while functionally and structurally different from myths, were historically and thematically rooted in mythological narratives. But the civilized period of Russian history and the written records of Russian culture do not preserve a single meaningful piece of early Russian mythology. As a result, Russia has been effectively

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deprived of an intellectual foothold for its own overarching worldview. As late as 1922, Gustav Shpet could still characterize Russian philosophical culture in the following way: "Philosophical consciousness as a form of social consciousness, philosophical culture, genuine philosophy itself as pure knowledge and as a liberal art belong exclusively to Russia's future" (Shpet 1991, 238–39).

At the same time, Russian culture during its formative period was basically (philosophically, politically, and even geographically) cut off from the rest of the world. While religiously isolated from Asia, Russians could not pick up philosophical ideas in the West because they were politically estranged from Europe for three centuries by Tatar and Mongol dominance, and for many more centuries by the autocratic arrogance of their czars. They were also culturally alienated from the Greek and Latin inheritance due to their unfamiliarity with the classical languages.

As a result of all these factors, no truly authoritative culturewide narrative has emerged in Russia, and Russian society was bound to turn into a postmodern one.

Western Convergence with Russia

The postmodern cultural syndrome whose presence is so visible over the last quarter of a century in the West has changed the nature of Western dialogue and made it much closer to the sterile Russian model. The final verdict from both the analytic and Continental philosophical traditions (from Wittgenstein as well as from Heidegger) was clear: the existence of objective reality is doubtful and truth is socially contingent. Therefore all generalizations are ungrounded and rather purposely deceitful. (Although postmodernism is a fruit of intrinsic Western evolution, we should take notice of a direct, albeit small, influence from Russia: one of the early theoreticians of postmodernism, the French semiologist, writer, and philosopher Julia Kristeva, used some of Bakhtin's ideas, such as "polyphonic dialogue" and "carnival consciousness," to galvanize the postmodern movement.)

Both analytic and Continental postmodernisms have found their most eloquent mouthpiece in Richard Rorty. According to Rorty, it is not true that abstract intellectual principles may be responsible for our everyday conduct and for our culture. Contrary to this "objec-

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tivist" and rationalist approach, he assumes that it is communal dialogue that actually shapes social practices and cultural forms.

The problem is that a dialogue is not just an act of communication but also, at least implicitly, a search for a better explanation of the world or for a better organization of social life. If our society is altogether free of normative elements, the paramount norm of truth-seeking will be absent from our dialogues. This indeed is the case in Russia, where dialogue that does not follow any cultural norm and does not pursue any definite goal has long been the predominant form of communication. And this is exactly what postmodernist theory recommends for all: "It is hard to see what difference is made by the difference between saying 'there is only the dialogue' and saying 'there is also that to which the dialogue converges' " (Rorty 1995, 357). Postmodernists proudly operate within the narrow framework of the "lonely provincialism" of isolated communities: "Everybody is ethnocentric when engaged in actual debate, no matter how much realist rhetoric about objectivity he produces in his study" (ibid., 359).

Rorty is right that the starting point for any intellectual discussion is a "pragmatic" one, that is, "where we are now." But it should not necessarily be our destination.

Postmodern cultural pragmatism is the ideology of a soft, "non-sadistic" community, where nobody struggles to impose "his" or "her" truths upon others. Practically, it means that, for the sake of not slipping out of the framework of a communal dialogue, everyone should brainwash his or her mind according to the latest intellectual fashion. A difficulty, however, is that the typical contenders for popularity are usually the most primitive ideas, which present reality in a crudely schematic and formulaic way.

But the worst thing in this situation is not the lowering of intellectual standards and public taste as such; it is the impossibility of raising them again. The real problem of "mass society" is not that so many vulgar and tasteless cultural forms are available to the public. The problem is that nothing is opposed to them, because there is no turf to compete on, nor reason to challenge prevailing norms or be original and bold: where the sociological criterion of popularity dominates, the ideal of objective truth is abandoned. The pragmatic principle, which states that what is socially agreeable and conventionally acceptable is really good, denies the values of objectivity and reason. If people do not believe that they are sometimes able to be more right than others and meaningfully argue about that, then they have

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to follow some familiar pattern: market trends, social conventions, or intellectual fashions.

If we base our viewpoints and our policies on public opinion, we are doomed to eliminate real intellectual competition, individual creativity, and inventiveness, because people usually vote for the familiar and urge their intellectual and political leaders to imitate well-known cultural examples and duplicate previously established policies. "An expression such as 'popular initiative' is . . . misleading and propagandistic. . . . Ideas . . . can only be the work of single individuals," even though "many people are subsequently able to see whether the ideas were good or bad, especially if they have had direct experience of their consequences" (Popper 1996, 72).

Although cultural primitivism may seem beneficial to political elites, in fact the permanent use of only popular or commercially successful values is a double-edged sword. Unlike political or economic measures to control society, this tool is detrimental to elites as much as to the public because it levels everybody down to a single mental standard, taking away from the entire society its intellectual integrity and ingenuity.

The appeal to cultural tolerance, which eliminates productive dialogue and intellectual competition guided by the concept of objective truth, is, in fact, a recipe for forced uniformity (either cultural or political or both). If it is not the pursuit of truth that motivates and mobilizes people, then either a cultural example imposes itself on them as their social standard solely because of its fleeting popularity; or political institutions will have to put society in order; or, in the worst-case scenario, a single political center will be responsible for everything, and surely for culture.

* * *

The first Russian nationalist writer, Ivan V. Kireevsky (1911, 268), discovered the flaw deeply embedded in Russian society:

> If there is an evil in Russia, if there is a disorder in its social relationships, if there are always reasons for the Russian man to suffer, all of them are firmly rooted in the disrespect for the sanctity of *truth*. . . . A Russian . . . does not value his pronounced word at all. His word is not him, it is his thing he owns as if under Roman property law, that is, he can use and destroy it without any public responsibility. . . . He consid-

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> ers a lie as . . . a kind of superficial sin that originates in the necessity of social relations which he regards as a kind of unreasonable force.

But now in the West many are doubtful that they could ever get a firm grip on reality, political or psychological, individual or social. When there is a pervasive feeling that nothing is certain and nobody is credible and different viewpoints are basically equal, the ideal of searching for objective truth is naturally replaced by the pragmatic strategy of finding comfortable agreements and useful myths (even the term "truth" becomes suspicious and often yields to nebulous euphemisms: "authenticity," "transparency," and so on). The retreat from reality in twentieth-century culture that first marked philosophical speculation and artistic experimentation has eventually reached public life and mass psychology, making it impossible to distinguish any longer childish fantasies from social and historical facts, public debate from entertainment, and cultural values from their market prices.

If postmodernism is nothing other than a mirror of failed culture, then the postmodern West now finds itself exactly at the point the Russians are trying to leave, in a desperate attempt to escape the unfortunate pattern of their civilization.

NOTE

1. See, for example, Venclova 1998.

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Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald

MISFORTUNE, WELFARE REFORM, AND RIGHT-WING EGALITARIANISM

ABSTRACT: *A close look at the rhetoric in America's recent welfare-reform debate has both surprising and important implications for political philosophy. Political philosophers typically presume that opponents of redistribution are motivated by considerations other than equality. Recent arguments for welfare reform, however, have been formulated in a manner consistent with most contemporary egalitarian theories. This result should make us question either the political relevance of egalitarian ideals or the adequacy of those theories of equality.*

In the summer of 1996 President Clinton signed "The Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996." While Clinton had vetoed two earlier bills that proposed more radical changes to welfare policies, the act that he did sign made the most sweeping changes in American poverty programs since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. The 1996 law abolished Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), JOBS (the work training program for welfare recipients), and Emergency Assistance to Families with Children (which provided temporary aid for a maximum of one month each year).

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Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, telephone (225) 388-2385, e-mail pfitzge@lsu.edu, thanks Jeffrey Friedman, Miriam Boleyn-Fitzgerald, and David Schmidtz for comments on earlier versions of this paper, and Louisiana State University's Council on Research Summer Stipend Program for financial support.

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The act replaced these programs with bloc grants given to the states, eliminated all federal entitlements to aid, and cut funding for welfare programs by $54 billion over six years.

Most people who call themselves egalitarians considered the initial Republican proposals for reform Draconian, and they believed that most components of the bill that did pass were steps in the wrong direction. In other words, most egalitarians would say that welfare reform moved the United States away from equality. One might assume, then, that the arguments given by proponents of reform were straightforwardly anti-egalitarian—that they were grounded in concerns about liberty, individual rights, or perhaps a conservative and anti-egalitarian vision of community. Surprisingly, this is not so. The most influential argument used to defend welfare reform was, in fact, wholly consistent with what many egalitarian philosophers identify as the essence of their ideal—minimizing involuntary disadvantage. Because the proponents of reform favored reducing redistribution even while justifying this reduction by means of egalitarian values, I call them "right-wing egalitarians." If we were to accept the most extreme right-wing egalitarian arguments, we would be moved to eliminate welfare programs altogether.

The implication of the right-wing egalitarian position is either that equality is impotent as a political ideal or that the ideal of equality is something other than what most modern egalitarians maintain.

Equality of Fortune

Over the past several decades a great deal of philosophical attention has been devoted to the question: Equality of what? Although a wide variety of answers to this question have been proposed, some general features are common to many, if not most, of them. Egalitarian philosophers often endorse a general ideal of equality that has been called "equality of fortune" or "luck egalitarianism" (Anderson 1999, 289). According to advocates of equality of fortune, the aim of equality is to eliminate or minimize the effects of brute bad luck—disadvantages that are no fault of one's own. Richard Arneson (1990, 177) states this principle clearly: "the ideal of equal opportunity for welfare is roughly that other things equal, it is morally wrong if some people are worse off than others through no fault or voluntary choice of their own."

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While Ronald Dworkin endorses equality of resources rather than Arneson's equal opportunity for welfare, he holds a similar attitude toward misfortune. In general, Dworkin (1981, 311) maintains, an egalitarian should make distributions sensitive to people's voluntary ambitions but insensitive to their natural and involuntary endowments.

> On the one hand we must, on pain of violating equality, allow the distribution of resources at any particular moment to be (as we might say) ambition-sensitive. It must, that is, reflect the cost or benefit to others of the choices people make so that, for example, those who choose to invest rather than consume, or to consume less expensively rather than more, or to work in more rather than less profitable ways, must be permitted to retain the gains that flow from these decisions in an equal auction followed by free trade. But on the other hand, we must not allow the distribution of resources at any moment to be endowment-sensitive, that is, to be affected by differences in ability of the sort that produce income differences in a laissez-faire economy among people with the same ambitions.

When distributions are sensitive to ambitions, individuals get rewarded for being responsible for their actions. Ambition-sensitive distributions reward choices that minimize the costs borne by others and those that bring benefits to others. When distributions are insensitive to endowments, however, we ensure that social benefits are not distributed for reasons *other than* the responsible choices of individuals.

Eric Rakowski (1997, 248) maintains a similar attitude toward misfortune when he endorses a theory of equality of resources: "Justice generally requires, I shall argue, that people be compensated for ill fortune against which they were unable to insure adequately and the risk of which they did not choose to run." And even though G. A. Cohen rejects both equality of resources and equal opportunity for welfare in favor of his own theory—equal access to advantage—he holds a nearly identical position to the others regarding misfortune. He argues that egalitarians should compensate "only for those welfare deficits which are not in some way traceable to the individual's choices" (Cohen 1989, 914). He writes:

> A person is *exploited* when unfair advantage is taken of him, and he suffers from (bad) *brute luck* when his bad luck is not the result of a

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> gamble or risk which he could have avoided. I believe that the primary egalitarian impulse is to extinguish the influence on distribution of both exploitation and brute luck. (Ibid., 908)

John Roemer (1994, 179–80) nicely summarizes the common thread running through these theories of equality: "*society should indemnify people against poor outcomes that are the consequences of causes that are beyond their control, but not against outcomes that are the consequences of causes that are within their control,* and therefore for which they are personally responsible." Though they dispute some of the implications of equality of fortune, most egalitarian philosophers agree that this ideal involves minimizing the effects of misfortunes that are not the fault of the unfortunate.

Philosophers who defend the ideal of equality of fortune usually contend that it implies redistributing resources to the poor. Dworkin spends a considerable amount of effort trying to show that his interpretation of equality leads in that direction, ideally distributing resources so that the opportunity costs of the resources people control are equal. While other egalitarians disagree with the details of Dworkin's theory, they agree about the redistributive implication of egalitarianism. For instance, Cohen begins his Tanner Lectures with the example of Margaret Thatcher's cut in the tax rate paid by Britain's highest income earners. Cohen considers the tax cut inegalitarian but notes that one of the most politically effective justifications for it—the incentives argument—has been embraced by some left-wing liberals. Cohen's goal is to show that the incentives argument is inconsistent with egalitarianism, which cannot, he believes, justify any significant inequality of income (Cohen 1991, 269). Similarly, Thomas Nagel (1991, 74) writes that he "would require a system much more equal than now exists in most democratic countries."

Right-Wing Egalitarianism

When President Clinton (1996, 2216) announced that he would sign the welfare reform bill he said, "A long time ago I concluded that the current welfare system undermines the basic values of work, responsibility and family, trapping generation after generation in dependency and hurting the very people it was designed to help." He maintained that welfare reform would solve this problem by giving the states

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strong incentives to place welfare recipients in jobs. So, he concluded, he would sign the bill because it would help those on welfare. He did, however, see problems with it. The bill cut nutritional subsidies to children and it denied eligibility to legal immigrants. The latter provision was especially troublesome, Clinton said, for immigrant families "who fall on hard times through no fault of their own" (ibid., 2217). He pledged to try to alter the components of welfare reform that he considered most worrisome. He said, "I will do everything in my power, in other words, to make sure that this bill lifts people up and does not become an excuse for anyone to turn their backs on this problem or on people who are generally in need through no fault of their own" (ibid.). Out of a stated concern for the well-being of the poor and for involuntary disadvantage, then, Clinton restricted redistribution, even though he would have preferred to restrict redistribution less.

Clinton's position is a moderate version of right-wing egalitarianism. It is right-wing in the sense that he significantly cut redistribution. It is egalitarian in the sense that the stated reason for reducing redistribution was to better achieve equality of fortune. Many Republicans wanted more radical changes in welfare programs, and some wanted to eliminate welfare altogether. But the arguments for this stronger right-wing position were also egalitarian. They rested on claims about what would most benefit the poor, and held that reducing redistribution even more would minimize the effects of misfortune.

In the rest of this section I will discuss the arguments of congressional Republicans and also the work of social theorist Charles Murray, journalism professor Marvin Olasky, and philosopher David Schmidtz. Murray and Olasky were both cited by Republicans during the congressional debates, so their positions may help us understand what influenced Republican thinking. Schmidtz is a philosopher who deploys against welfare programs an argument similar in form to that of other right-wing egalitarians, but his is a more sophisticated version of their doctrine.

Newt Gingrich (1995, 71), then Speaker of the House, made a classic right-wing egalitarian argument when he contended that America needed welfare reform because welfare was bad for the poor: "The welfare state reduces the poor from citizens to clients. It breaks up families, minimizes work incentives, blocks people from saving and acquiring property, and overshadows dreams of a promised future

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with a present despair born of poverty, violence and hopelessness." Gingrich does not mention such issues as desert, merit, the well-being of the rich, or property rights.

Charles Murray's arguments also focus on the well-being of the poor. He contends that "all of us, libertarian or social democrat, conservative or liberal, have a common test to put to our prescriptions for dealing with social problems: *Am I convinced that if my plan is adopted, the net effect will be less suffering and human need than would exist under any alternative I can think of?*" (Murray 1997, 128). It should be noted that this principle is different than the principle of minimizing misfortune. If we are worried about minimizing suffering and human need then we might want to remedy suffering for which individuals *are* responsible. Thus, Murray (ibid., 125) expresses a concern for the plight of the "feckless" as well as the "luckless": "What becomes of those who are helpless, or luckless, or perhaps simply feckless," he writes, "must deeply concern any human being worthy of the name." Murray, however, believes that the goal of minimizing suffering and the goal of minimizing misfortune do not conflict. As I will point out shortly, Murray's arguments lean heavily on the idea of personal responsibility, and it will be clear that he does not propose any compensation for suffering that results from irresponsibility.

Olasky argues that under a system of privately run welfare provision, the poor would be better off because they could receive essential non-material aid. "Change in poverty-fighting is needed," he contends, "but Americans need to be clear about the reasons for change. Governmental welfare programs need to be fought not because they are too expensive—although clearly, much money is wasted—but because they are inevitably too stingy in what is really important, treating people as people and not animals" (Olasky 1992, 232–33). Schmidtz, too, focuses on the well-being of the poor. He begins with the general question, "What makes people better off?" (Schmidtz and Goodin 1998, 5), and goes on to argue that a system that encourages personal responsibility does the best job of making everybody better off, including the poor. "People are better off," he writes, "thinking of their welfare as their own responsibility rather than as the government's responsibility. They are better off living (and their children are better off growing up) in communities where people take responsibility for their own welfare" (ibid.).

Right-wing egalitarians do not hope to eliminate all misfortune. Schmidtz (1997, 1), for example, allows that

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> people have accidents. They get old. They eat too much. They have bad luck. And sooner or later, something will be fatal. It would be a better world if such things did not happen, but they do. There is no use arguing about it. What is worth arguing about is whether it makes for a better world when people have to pay for other people's misfortunes and mistakes rather than (or as well as) their own.

Murray (1997, 127) holds a similar position, maintaining that "there can be no such thing as a society free of human suffering. No matter what social and economic system is put in place, some proportion of children will be neglected, some adults will be desperately lonely, some people will suffer terrible accidents and diseases that leave them incapacitated, and some people will live in squalor." Right-wing egalitarians are under no delusion that their proposals will solve all the problems of the poor, or even of poverty. They do, however, claim that their proposals will minimize suffering and misfortune. Although some suffering and misfortune is unavoidable, right-wing egalitarians maintain that needless suffering exists today and that it results from counterproductive government programs. Redistribution, Schmidtz (1997, 1) maintains, tries too hard to make sure no one ever loses and ends up "making people worse off in the process." Murray (1997, 126) claims that "the entry of government into social insurance and then into a broader range of social interventions has caused incalculable human suffering."

The main problem, according to right-wing egalitarianism, is that government programs encourage individuals to become irresponsible. Schmidtz (1997, 2) claims that government programs lure individuals and sometimes corporations (for example, pulp mills that are granted limited liability for environmental damage) into externalizing their responsibility for the

> messes they cause, for the messes in which they find themselves. Responsibility is externalized when people regard the cleanup as someone else's problem. We can speak of responsibility being externalized whether the messes result from mistake, misfortune, or . . . from business as usual.

Internalizing responsibility, by contrast, occurs "when agents take responsibility: for their welfare, for their futures, for the consequences of their actions" (ibid.). (Economists speak of costs being internalized when the same agent whose choices create a cost has to pay for it,

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and costs being externalized when the agent whose choices create a cost is not the one who pays for it.) According to Schmidtz (ibid., 16), redistributive programs cultivate a social ethos where individuals externalize responsibility: "Systematically *rewarding* productive effort helps people internalize responsibility and thus helps make for a peaceful and productive society. Trying to guarantee that productive effort will be *unnecessary* helps make for the opposite."

While Schmidtz is against externalizing responsibility, he is not against collectives assuming responsibility. A group may internalize responsibility for a problem if all its members agree that they should do so. As an example Schmidtz points to "friendly societies" near the turn of the twentieth century, which provided their members with such social services as unemployment insurance. Because membership was determined by voluntary agreement, this kind of collective responsibility did not undermine "a culture of personal initiative and accountability" (Schmidtz 1997, 9). Schmidtz concludes by claiming that "it is a worse world when people can foist the cost of their misfortunes and misadventures on others without consent" (ibid., 126).

Murray and Olasky similarly argue that government programs are at odds with individual responsibility. One way that individuals may become irresponsible is by becoming dependent on the government. Murray (1997, 126) holds that "the welfare state has artificially, needlessly created a large dependent class. At the bottom is the underclass, stripped of dignity and autonomy, producing new generations socialized to their parents' behavior." Olasky (1996, 27) claims that

> during the past three decades, we have seen lives destroyed and dreams die among poor individuals who have gradually become used to dependency. Those who stressed independence used to be called the "worthy poor"; now, anyone who will not work is worthy, and mass pauperism is accepted. Now, those who are willing to put off immediate gratification and to sacrifice leisure time in order to remain independent are called chumps rather than champs.

This form of argument is the same one used by congressional Republicans when they argued for welfare reform. The most notorious case of a dependency argument during the congressional debates came from Rep. John Mica (1995, H3766). He said:

> Mr. Chairman, I represent Florida where we have many lakes and natural reserves. If you visit these areas, you may see a sign like this that

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> reads, "Do not feed the alligators." We post these signs for several reasons. First, because if left in a natural state, alligators can fend for themselves. They work, gather food and care for their young. Second, we post these warnings because unnatural feeding and artificial care creates dependency. When dependency sets in, these otherwise able-bodied alligators can no longer survive on their own. Now, I know people are not alligators, but I submit to you that with our current handout, nonwork welfare system, we have upset the natural order. We have failed to understand the simple warning signs. We have created a system of dependency.

Actually, alligators don't care for their young in nature (although they do sometimes eat them), and alligators don't become dependent on humans (although they do become aggressive and learn to bite the hand that feeds them). But this is all beside the point. Mica's sentiment is clear: government only makes things worse. The poor are better off when the government does nothing.

While Mica's version of the dependency argument was probably the most memorable, it was certainly not the only one heard during the welfare reform debate. Other Republicans argued that the welfare system "ensnared" its recipients, that it caused "dependency" among them and that it was "cruel" to the very people it was designed to help. Giving out money for nothing, Republicans argued, "trapped" recipients in a culture of poverty.[1] Welfare recipients are tempted by cash outlays to adopt a way of life that condemns them and their children to a life of poverty. Given that the title of the original Republican bill was "The Personal Responsibility Act," it is hard to overestimate the importance of this argument in justifying welfare reform.

At times right-wing egalitarians talk of irresponsibility without talking about dependency. Besides the general problem of dependency, welfare programs are thought to encourage out-of-wedlock births because they reduce the cost of having a baby enough to make it viable for mothers to have children with little or no help from fathers, or even, supposedly, because women will have children for the money. This, too, was a central theme of welfare reform. The legislation begins with Congress proclaiming that "marriage is the foundation of a successful society" (Sec. 101 (1)). Schmidtz laments that

> in the United States, out-of-wedlock births have risen by over 600 percent since 1960. They now comprise over 30 percent of the total. (Japan's illegitimacy rate, by comparison, is 1.1 percent.) Thirty per-

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> cent of out-of-wedlock births are to teenagers. Sixty percent are to women who were teenagers when they began bearing out-of-wedlock children. Several studies suggest that incentive structures of programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have made the problem worse. (Schmidtz and Goodin 1998, 17–18)

Olasky (1992, 200) makes the point more polemically: "Nowhere has the movement away from true compassion, and its emphasis on affiliation and bonding, been more evident (and more tragic) than in the area of unmarried pregnancy."

Since right-wing egalitarians claim that welfare programs cause avoidable misfortune, it is not surprising what they suggest as the solution. Murray (1997, 130) proposes that we

> end governmental transfer payments, in cash, kind, or services. Do not substitute less coercive government programs for the ones we have now. Do not try to make the best of a bad situation. Dismantle every vestige of the state social-insurance and welfare apparatus and constitutionally forbid its reappearance. I include in this statement every middle-class entitlement, agricultural subsidy, and corporate subsidy along with programs for the poor.

Schmidtz holds out the prospect of a world where "people come together of their own free will to share each other's burdens" (Schmidtz and Goodin 1998, 19). Olasky also proposes the elimination of all governmental social programs, but he favors tax breaks for private giving. Gingrich (1996, x) seems to agree. In the preface to one of Olasky's recent books, he writes,

> Piecemeal efforts to repair our system and its culture of poverty and violence are doomed to fail. . . . We must find a way to address the problems of the whole person. This is what Marvin Olasky explains so well: that to be effective charity must be personal, challenging and spiritual—requirements government cannot meet.

The Political Irrelevance of Libertarianism

Philosophers tend to assume that a challenge to the existence of social programs will be based on libertarian theories of rights or entitlements. These theories are the most popular forms of right-wing argument in the philosophical literature, but as the welfare debate

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suggests, they are not the most politically influential. (To my knowledge no politician during the welfare debate claimed that welfare should be eliminated because welfare programs violate the entitlements of property holders.) Rather than depending on a libertarian theory of rights, the right-wing egalitarian argument should be seen as a type of spontaneous-order argument. Such arguments suggest that unplanned orders are in some ways better than planned ones. These arguments are common in economics, most notably in the work of Adam Smith and F. A. Hayek (1997, 233–42). They also occur in theories about scientific progress, such as Michael Polanyi's (Polanyi 1997, 225–32).

Smith and Hayek argue that a wealthy society is ordered spontaneously. When individuals are moved by their own preferences rather than trying to follow a central plan, they act in ways that produce the unintended consequence of social wealth. Similarly, Polanyi saw scientific progress as spontaneously ordered. When scientists pursue their own individually planned projects, the unintended consequence is scientific progress. In parallel fashion, right-wing egalitarians contend that the minimization of misfortune occurs spontaneously. When individuals are moved by their own preferences rather than a social plan designed to reduce misfortune, they unintentionally produce that very result.

The claim that equality is spontaneously ordered depends crucially on the claim that government plans to minimize misfortune result in irresponsibility. Right-wing egalitarians usually don't distinguish between different kinds or areas of responsibility, but their arguments suggest four different ways that individuals will act more responsibly if redistribution is reduced or eliminated.

The first two kinds of responsibility require people to bear the costs of those actions that may result in their being in a condition of need. First, if the government does not guarantee individual needs, then people will not take actions that will foreseeably put them in conditions of need. This kind of responsibility is the primary focus of right-wing egalitarianism. References to dependency, for example, imply this kind of responsibility as the antidote. Without a government safety net, able-bodied but financially insecure adults will not forego available work. By the same token, a woman will take greater precautions against having a baby if she knows that neither she nor the father is willing or able to support the child financially (will the fathers act responsibly also?). Murray (1997, 132) makes a general

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claim to this effect when he maintains that "freedom makes it much easier for people to make good on their personal responsibilities." Second, right-wing egalitarians argue that people will take responsibility for *unforeseeable* consequences by insuring against misfortune. Hence, Schmidtz, Murray, and Olasky all cite friendly societies as examples of individuals voluntarily coming together to protect themselves against an uncertain future.

If right-wing egalitarians were to stop with the first two kinds of responsibility, it would leave an obvious gap. What about individuals who never had the resources necessary to insure against misfortune before it strikes? The third and forth kinds of responsibility, then, are types of individual responsibility in providing aid. The third way that people will act responsibly is by giving aid voluntarily when government programs are dismantled. Murray (1997, 138) contends that "the genius of free human beings is that, given responsibility, they join together to take care of each other—to be their brothers' keepers when their brother needs help." Elsewhere he suggests that

> what is required is no more complicated, and no less revolutionary, than recognizing first, that the energy and effective compassion that went into solving the problems of the needy in 1900, deployed in the context of today's national wealth, can work wonders; and secondly, that such energy and such compassion cannot be mobilized in a modern welfare state. The modern welfare state must be dismantled. (Murray 1992, xvi)

The fourth kind of individual responsibility involves not just giving aid, but giving it responsibly. This is why Murray and Olasky claim that we must make a distinction between the deserving and undeserving (irresponsible) poor, and that this can be done only by private individuals. Individual benefactors would take responsibility for the outcome of their aid by trying to determine whether potential beneficiaries were responsible for their own plight rather than suffering from brute bad luck.[2]

If the right-wing egalitarian position is correct, then we cannot eliminate misfortune. But eliminating government programs would minimize misfortune by creating the conditions under which individuals act most responsibly. Left-wing egalitarians will undoubtedly disagree with the spontaneous-order argument, but that does not alter the fact that the disagreement would be among egalitarians. The

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disagreement would be over *how* we could best minimize misfortune, not *whether* we should.

Most widely accepted philosophical arguments against libertarianism are irrelevant to right-wing egalitarianism. To G. A. Cohen's argument that the libertarian notion of freedom is essentially flawed, the right-wing egalitarian will point out that his argument does not turn on any particular notion of freedom. To any of the many criticisms of entitlement theories of rights, the right-wing egalitarian can point out that his argument does not depend on such a theory. To advocates of the difference principle, the right-wing egalitarian will claim that getting rid of redistribution would make the least advantaged as well off as is practicable.

Left-Wing Responses to Right-Wing Egalitarianism

Some left-wing egalitarians, however, have addressed the issue of dependency and responsibility directly. Robert Goodin has made two points that deserve special note. Goodin first argues that the idea of dependency is a moralized term that can provide no independent reason against welfare policies. Second, he claims that there is an important distinction between two kinds of responsibility—blame responsibility and task responsibility—that proponents of the dependency argument ignore. Each of these points, I believe, is useful and important, but neither is an adequate response to the right-wing egalitarian's spontaneous-order argument.

First, Goodin asks why, when we are all dependent on a great many things, we should consider dependency on government assistance as something to avoid. Goodin suggests three possible answers: that dependency on government aid is unnatural, that it is voluntary, or that it is especially risky. He considers each of these possibilities carefully and then rejects them. We need not consider his arguments in detail, however, because these three reasons are tangential to the right-wing positions we have examined. Goodin concludes that the idea of dependency used by opponents of welfare is a moralized term. He states, "We are left with the simple conclusion that the objection to welfare dependency is instead that people are relying on things on which *morally* they ought not rely" (Schmidtz and Goodin 1988, 122). According to Goodin, the "advocates of those arguments want the notions of self-reliance, dependency, and personal responsi-

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bility to do some *independent work* in their arguments. They want those notions to give us some *independent reasons* for doing one thing rather than another" (ibid., 139).

While it is easy to label some pattern of activity "dependency" and quickly conclude that it must therefore be avoided, the right-wing egalitarians avoid this mistake. They do not suggest that dependence on the government is *intrinsically* wrong, but merely that it has unfortunate long-term *consequences*. The right-wing egalitarian could, therefore, accept Goodin's argument and admit that there are no intrinsic moral differences between dependence on government aid and dependence on the family or other forms of private support. He would add, however, that different consequences are associated with dependence on government aid than are associated with other kinds of dependence. While some opponents of welfare believe that dependence on government aid is independently wrong regardless of the consequences (because of religious or philosophical views about the proper role of the family or of the state), the right-wing egalitarian believes that at least one reason dependence on government aid should be avoided is because it has negative long-term consequences.

Goodin's second argument is that opponents of welfare reform often ignore the distinction between "blame responsibility" and "task responsibility." Blame responsibility seeks to assess the cause of a particular misfortune; task responsibility seeks to determine who should deal with the misfortune. Goodin's point is that just because a person may be to blame for her own misfortune, she should not necessarily have the task of remedying it. However, this argument is at odds with the intuition that disadvantages are problems of inequality only when an agent is not responsible for them. To assign task responsibility to someone who is not to blame for the problem would constitute what Cohen calls exploitation. Moreover, Goodin's distinction is consistent with the consequentialist framework of the spontaneous-order argument without damaging that argument. The spontaneous-order argument suggests that assigning task responsibility to someone other than the blameworthy individual will have bad long-term consequences. The left-wing egalitarian either has to reject this consequentialist claim or suggest that there are nonconsequentialist reasons that should move us to support welfare despite its bad consequences.

A similar problem arises if the left-wing egalitarian tries to oppose libertarian ideas of responsibility. Stephen Perry (1997) has recently argued that libertarians accept a theory of outcome responsibility that

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is the flip side of an entitlement theory of rights. Outcome responsibility claims that individuals own the negative consequences of their actions just as they own the positive consequences. According to Perry, this theory is unsatisfactory because harm results from interactions between people and cannot be said to have been caused by any one individual.

Right-wing egalitarians do seem to embrace an outcome theory of responsibility, but it does not play a justificatory role in their argument. It may affect the way right-wing egalitarians express their arguments against redistribution, but it does not affect the arguments themselves. According to the right-wing egalitarian, we should eliminate welfare programs not because individuals *are responsible* for the outcomes of their actions, but because in the absence of such programs individuals *will take responsibility* for the outcomes of their actions. The right-wing egalitarian could accept Perry's argument without having to alter her own position. She would merely have to say: "However we decide we should analyze the notion of responsibility, I continue to claim that without government interference people will more effectively respond to the problem of poverty; if others want to call this response something other than 'responsibility,' they are free to do so."

Ideology in Political Debate

It might appear from the foregoing discussion that right- and left-wing egalitarians agree on the egalitarian end and disagree only about the empirical question of how to achieve it. If there is no dispute over basic values, then the question of redistribution turns on the plausibility of spontaneously ordering equality of fortune. This seems to have been the main issue in the political debate.

The primary response of Democratic opponents to Republican welfare reform proposals was that the proposals were based on factually incorrect claims, and that cutting welfare would, in reality, hurt the poor. Just days before Clinton signed the welfare bill, Sen. Patrick Moynihan (1996, S9328) said that "it terminates the basic Federal commitment of support for dependent children in hopes of altering the behavior of their mothers. We are putting those children at risk with absolutely no evidence that this radical idea has even the slightest chance of success." Numerous scholars who specialized in poverty

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research, Moynihan pointed out, were against the bill. Some of these scholars issued a joint statement that said in part,

> As researchers who have dedicated years to the study of poverty, the labor market, and public assistance, we oppose the welfare reform legislation under consideration by Congress. The best available evidence is that this legislation would substantially increase poverty and destitution while doing little to change the welfare system to one that provides greater opportunity for families in return for demanding greater responsibility. (Ibid.)

As these responses indicate, the welfare-reform debate revolved around an empirical question: What consequences will various welfare policies have on the well-being of the poor? It is not clear, however, how empirical research can decide between the answers given by left- and right-wing egalitarians, especially if the decision is to be made by democratic legislatures inexpert in such research. For one thing, empirical research would take many years to produce definitive answers. Right-wing egalitarians argue that eliminating welfare programs will create a new ethos that, in the long run, will have tremendous benefits. If we couldn't see any behavioral changes after five years, the right-wing egalitarian could easily say, "We need more time to change the ethos of a society." For another thing, whatever evidence is gathered would be open to numerous interpretations. Consider, for example, Schmidtz's worries about the relatively minor effects welfare may have on economic growth. "If the annual growth rate of America's gross domestic product (GDP) had been 1 percentage point lower between 1870 and 1990," he writes, "America's per-capita GDP would be less than one-third its current level, which would put it on par with Mexico" (Schmidtz and Goodin 1998, 61).

If the debate turns on such small and long-term economic effects, then we cannot expect empirical research to be very helpful. There are too many variables in a changing society to isolate the effect of welfare policies with precision and certainty. This is not to say that we cannot form reasonable theories, but instead that we could form more than one reasonable theory. Moreover, we must remember that what we need is not a conclusion that would convince most specialists, but most voters—and not merely most voters at one isolated point in time, but election after election.

How will democratic decision makers choose which welfare policy

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to endorse? They will speculate. The average voter, for example, will have no option other than guessing which policy has the best long-term consequences, and the average elected representative is probably in no better position. In speculating about long-term consequences they may be inordinately swayed by any number of prejudices or preconceived ideas. When the truth does not present itself clearly, it is easy to seize on the evidence that supports one's ideological presuppositions.

The consequence of applying equality of fortune to the welfare debate is not usefully neutral in the sense that it avoids blind ideological presuppositions or commitments. It is tragically neutral in the sense that it provides democratic voters and their representatives with no reason to challenge their blind ideological commitments. For equality of fortune would focus the debate on the empirical question that did, in fact, command the lion's share of attention: Which policy is best for the poor? Answers to this question will be determined by prejudice and mood more than reasoned deliberation or real debate. If this consequence is inevitable, then the implications for the ideal of equality are dismal: it would appear impotent as a political ideal, for it requires democratic bodies to make decisions based on speculation about economic effects over the course of decades or even generations.

Beyond Equality of Fortune

But perhaps the real lesson to be learned from the welfare debate is not that the ideal of equality is impotent, but that when equality is viewed differently there actually are values, not just facts, in play in the welfare debate.

One place we might find contested values are in the Republican statements to which left-wing egalitarians took the greatest offense. I have already mentioned one of those statements, Rep. Mica's "don't feed the alligators" argument. Rep. Clay Shaw advanced a second argument that generated left-wing outrage. While discussing pregnant minors who receive welfare with another congressman, Shaw (1995, H3516) described them as children who "the gentleman would not leave his cat with over the weekend." When left-wing egalitarians heard these statements they were outraged, I believe, because they thought welfare recipients were being depicted as a lower class of

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people, as akin to alligators, as people not worthy of cat sitting. Mica's and Shaw's statements can be interpreted not as revealing an insensitivity to the well-being of welfare recipients, but as suggesting that welfare recipients are members of a lower class, do not have the same status as other citizens, or are in some way inferiors.

The claim that equality of fortune may overlook issues of class or status might be furthered by looking at a more dramatic historical case. Bernard Mandeville's "An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools" argues against *privately funded* free education for impoverished children on the grounds that both England and the poor themselves would be better off if they were ignorant. According to Mandeville (1988, 286), England would be better off, because "it is impossible that a Society can long subsist, and suffer many of its Members to live in Idleness, and enjoy all the Ease and Pleasure they can invent, without having at the same time great Multitudes of People that to make good this Defect will condescend to be quite the reverse, and by use and patience inure their Bodies to work for others and themselves besides." Accordingly, "the surest Wealth consists in a Multitude of laborious Poor" (ibid., 287). Educating the poor would thwart this goal in several ways. First, it would habituate them to laziness. "Going to School in comparison to Working is Idleness, and the longer Boys continue in this easy sort of Life, the more unfit they'll be when grown up for downright Labour, both as to Strength and Inclination" (ibid., 288). Second, once the poor are educated they will aspire to occupations other than hard labor, while if they remained uneducated, they would patiently "submit." Finally, there is the obvious loss of labor hours that comes when children go to school rather than work. Since "we have hardly Poor enough," it would be folly to educate them (ibid., 301–2).

To modern ears, Mandeville sounds as far from an egalitarian as one could get. His argument is, however, consistent with the ideal of equality of fortune, although it is economically outdated. (The rise of technology has both limited the need for manual labor and increased the need for a literate workforce. Under today's economic conditions, it is in no way plausible to claim that an economy depends on a large number of illiterate manual laborers. In the early eighteenth century, however, things appeared otherwise.) Mandeville claimed not only that his proposal would benefit society in general, but the poor in particular. He argued that the main consequence of education would be to produce desires in the poor that (under the economic condi-

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tions of his day) they could not satisfy, rendering them unhappy. He thought it undeniable that

> the more chearfully [work] is done the better, as well for those that perform it as for the rest of the Society. To be happy is to be pleas'd, and the less Notion a Man has of a better way of Living, the more content he'll be with his own; and on the other hand, the greater a Man's Knowledge and Experience is in the World, the more exquisite the Delicacy of his Taste, and the more consummate Judge he is of things in general, certainly the more difficult it will be to please him. (Ibid., 314)

If Mandeville had his economics (and psychology) right, then equalizing education would only make the poor unhappy, and an advocate of equality of fortune should not favor it.

To left-wing egalitarians, however, this conclusion might seem to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory of equality of fortune. Mandeville's beliefs are so antagonistic to left-wing moral intuitions that they may prod left-wing egalitarians to reconsider whether equality of fortune really expresses their sentiments. Mandeville may be interested in the poor's well-being insofar as they are satisfied, but his proposal would have the effect of maintaining distinctions of class.

Some theories of equality focus not on misfortune but on just such distinctions. Elizabeth Anderson (1999, 312), for example, notes that historically, egalitarian political movements have argued against social orders based on interpersonal hierarchy. "Inequality referred not so much to distributions of goods as to relations between superior and inferior persons." In her view, the central egalitarian claim is for the equal moral worth of all people. This claim gives egalitarians two goals: the negative one of abolishing hierarchy, and the positive one of creating a social order where people stand in relations of equality. From this perspective, Mandeville is clearly anti-egalitarian. He describes a social hierarchy and argues against disturbing it. According to the relational theory of equality, even if Mandeville got the facts right, his conclusion is wrong.

Viewed from the perspective of equality of fortune, the welfare debate properly turned on the question of which policy will minimize misfortune in the long run. From the perspective of relational equality, however, the question should have been: How can we relate to each other as equals? Perhaps welfare programs are necessary for relational equality, in that everyone must be provided with basic goods if

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all are to be equal members of society. Anderson (1999, 314) suggests that egalitarian principles "must identify certain goods to which all citizens must have effective access over the course of their whole lives. Some goods are more important from an egalitarian point of view than others, within whatever space of equality is identified as a particular concern for egalitarians."

Sometimes modern-day conservatives appear to oppose relational equality. For example, in *The Bell Curve* Charles Murray suggested that many social problems are associated with a lack of intelligence in the underclass. "Going on welfare really is a dumb idea," Murray (and coauthor Richard Herrnstein) wrote, "and that is why women who are low in cognitive ability end up there" (Murray and Herrnstein 1994, 201). The book is openly antagonistic to the idea that "all men are created equal" and favors a system that will "harmonize" the differences between the unintelligent and the "cognitive elite" (Murray 1994, 528). Murray does not favor the same kind of hierarchy as Mandeville, but he favors a hierarchy nonetheless. Consequently, the advocate of relational egalitarianism could easily dispute the values behind Murray's arguments.

Yet nobody in the welfare debate, as far as I know, invoked the Charles Murray of *The Bell Curve* rather than the Murray of *Losing Ground*. Moreover, while many right-wing arguments are neutral about questions of class distinctions, others actually seem to be grounded in a kind of relational egalitarianism. For example, conservatives sometimes argue that welfare stigmatizes recipients. As we have already heard Gingrich (1995, 71) say, "The welfare state reduces the poor from citizens to clients." This argument raises a serious issue for relational egalitarians: How can the poor be given material aid without others thinking less of them? The stigma of being on the receiving end of welfare may create the very divisions in society that the relational egalitarian seeks to avoid. If government programs designed to help the poor stand in the way of citizens relating to each other nonhierarchically, maybe we should abolish such programs in the interest of a society in which citizens stand as equals.

This possibility might revive our doubts about the political relevance of the ideal of equality, but there is some reason to conclude that we should prefer the political controversy generated by relational equality to the one generated by equality of fortune. Equality of fortune pushes democratic bodies to decide issues of redistribution based on questions they are ill prepared to answer. The consequence is that

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the issues of redistribution are decided by fruitless speculation. While relational equality does not avoid controversies between left-wing and right-wing egalitarians, it may avoid the speculative nature of these disputes. The answer to the question "What makes us feel like equals?" is determined, in large part, by culture and consensus. The resulting debate would depend less on the expertise of professionals than the emotions of ordinary citizens. Moreover, democratic deliberation on the issue of relational equality holds open the possibility of moving people closer to consensus. When people ask themselves "What would make us feel like equals?" they must engage their empathetic powers to determine what might cause a sense of inequality and what might rectify it. Finally, simply asking this question encourages individuals to commit themselves to a system where each relates to others as equals. Getting citizens to ask themselves this question is a way of reinforcing a beneficial public ethos. Hence, while it may seem preferable to leave the policy implications of equality of fortune to professional economists (and other social scientists), the policy implications of relational equality are better suited for democratic bodies to decide.

The welfare debate shows us that—depending on the long-term consequences of policy changes—the ideal of equality of fortune is consistent with right-wing views. Democratic bodies, however, can only speculate about these long-term consequences. As a result, the ideal of equality of fortune renders equality politically impotent. It does not provide effective guidance on policy questions.

Since most right-wing arguments are not elitist, even relational egalitarianism fails to clearly imply a specific welfare policy. But we should not conclude that it is politically impotent. Relational egalitarianism guides representatives and citizens to ask the most helpful question for determining welfare policy: What will make us feel like equals?

NOTES

1. The following are a few examples of Republicans using the dependency argument. Rep. Martin Hoke (1995, H3424) argued that the incentive structure of the current system is inherently cruel: "It is a perverse form of compassion that encourages children to have children by themselves and then traps those same children, both mother and child, in a dead-end cycle of Government dependency. Nothing could be more cruel than a system that does that." Rep.

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Gerald Solomon (1995, H3427) asked, "What kind of compassion is it that leaves unaltered a monolithic bureaucracy that has the ability to ensnare entire generations in the despair of poverty? What kind of compassion is it that saddles future generations with mountains of debt built on failed but costly programs—debt that harms the poor more than the better-off by stifling economic growth, opportunity, and meaningful jobs in the private sector?" And Rep. Frank Riggs (1995, H3340) quoted Ronald Reagan, who had said, "You cannot create a desert, hand a person a cup of water, and call that compassion. And you cannot build up years of dependence on government and dare call that hope." Also see Armey 1995.

2. Some readers may conclude that right-wing egalitarian arguments are not really spontaneous-order arguments because they depend on people consciously planning to alleviate poverty. The issue here is mainly definitional. When I claim that right-wing egalitarians believe equality of fortune will be spontaneously ordered, I mean that they think it will come about through individual action that is not centrally planned or coercively enforced.

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Doug Mann

THE LIMITS OF INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY IN SOCIAL EXPLANATION

ABSTRACT: *The goal of social explanation is to understand human action, both individual and collective. To do so successfully we must explain action on three distinct (but intertwined) levels: the actors' intentions, the meaning that actors and interpreters ascribe to action, and the structural ideals that govern action. Each level of explanation has certain types of rationality associated with it. Only on the level of intentionality does instrumental rationality assume a prime importance, yet even there it must compete with normative and expressive accounts of action.*

To what degree can human action be explained in rational terms? In answer to this question, I will propose a tripartite model of social explanation. Its goal is to produce a bird's-eye view of the archaeology of a social act within what I term a "structural idealist" model. Like Schliemann, who discovered at Troy seven distinct levels of the ancient city layered on top of each other, the social archaeologist can, I believe, unearth three distinct strata within any given social act: the *intentions* of the actor; the *meaning* of the act independent of those intentions, hermeneutically defined; and its *structural* context. Each of these three levels involves its own distinctive panorama of forms of rationality, as we shall see.

"Intention" is univalent and can usually be identified on a surface level with verbal utterance alone (assuming truth-telling actors). It is a

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Doug Mann, Department of Philosophy, University of Windsor, CHN 2184, 401 Sunset, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4, Canada, e-mail dimann@uwindsor.ca.

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good part of what Weber refers to as "subjective meaning." An intentional account of an act must take the actor at his or her word as far as motivation goes. But "meaning" is broader, encompassing a series of bivalences (such as those between stated and unstatable intentions, conscious and unconscious thought, nature and nurture, rationally justifiable political beliefs and disguised class interests). To discern the meaning of an action requires penetrating beneath the surface intentionality of the act and (sometimes) the conscious intention of the actor, as when we say, for example, that "her expression of anger towards her friend *really means* that her marriage is on the rocks and she is taking out her troubles on those around her," or "his libertarianism may superficially express his love of freedom, but on a *deeper level* shows that he is an apologist for the rich," i.e., this belief *means* something other than what its holder intends it to mean.

"Structure" is multivalent, subsuming both intention and meaning, but not submerging them, in an act's connection with other individual acts. Social structures can affect individual intentions only through "structural ideals," which we explain in large part by penetrating the *social* meaning of an act or series of acts by individual agents. Structural ideals are those ideas that "intend" social objects, whether to create, shape, maintain, or destroy them. They are the rules that a social actor considers to be "givens" (whether moral, aesthetic, or practical) in a particular situation. One can picture the existence of personal ideals, i.e. those ideas that do not intend social objects, as a noumenal ground for structural ideals; and certainly there are there many "ideas" (or thoughts) that are non-intentional, such as when I picture a canoe gliding across a lake. However, as soon as this picture is charged with a longing to be in that canoe, it becomes in some small way intentional, expressing perhaps a vague desire to escape the noise and bustle of the city for a week or two.

I call the model I sketch out in this paper "structural idealism" (although "structural interactionism" may be just as appropriate) because I see social structure as expressed first and foremost in the collective and shared *ideas* that constitute social reality for a group of actors, but as being a structuring, institutional horizon for social action all the same.[1] Shared ideas can lead to real social stratification and give real power to economic classes or cultural agents (keeping in mind that economic and cultural power interact).

The model I present here is metatheoretical, a prelude to social theory in general, a sort of "critique of sociological reason." The point is

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to show how to arrive at a complete case of social explanation. As to *what* such a case involves, it must tell a true story about the human acts under investigation. The truth of this story should rely on an interpretation of events that relates them to other, similar events, usually by using some type of narrative. I will not argue for sociological or historical laws or for causal explanations, but I will assume that human "purposes" (whether conscious or unconscious, intended or unintended) "cause" events to happen, and that social theory should aim at a true interpretation of human actions that in some way generalizes beyond their original narrow temporal and spatial context.

The Varieties of Rationality

We can categorize the varieties of rationality claimed by social theorists into three broad camps, with a number of further subdivisions:

1. Systemic Rationality (SR)
2. Instrumental Rationality (IR)
    2A. Descriptive Instrumental Rationality (DIR)
        2A1. Descriptive Selfish Instrumental Rationality (DSIR), which pursues material goods (DSIR-m) or objects of pleasure (DSIR-u)
    2B. Prescriptive Instrumental Rationality (PIR)
        2B1. Prescriptive Selfish Instrumental Rationality (PSIR)
3. Teleological Rationality (TR)
    3A. Descriptive Teleological Rationality (DTR)
    3B. Prescriptive Teleological Rationality (PTR)

1. *Systemic Rationality (SR).* To attribute SR to agents is to assume that they have reasons for their actions so that those actions can be comprehensible to the social theorist. This doesn't mean that all human action occurs for a conscious reason, or even that all human action can have a reason ascribed to it by the theorist. It does mean, however, that we must take as a methodological principle the notion that human action is significantly governed by *some* form of rationality (no matter how flawed) that can be understood independent of the actor's internal mental processes (i.e., by an external observer). Thus, human social action is in some sense rule-governed (but not necessarily selfish, or instrumentally rational, or part of an historical process that is moving toward some grand telos). If it weren't rule-governed, explanations of it

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would amount to intellectual solipsism, or, at best, pure description (if such a thing were possible).

SR can account for actions in pursuit of solidarity with social groups; doing things for their own sake; and behavior grounded in adherence to values or norms.

2. Instrumental Rationality (IR). To attribute IR to agents is to assume that they either do or should choose the best (most efficient, most cost-effective, etc.) means to whatever end they value the most in a given situation. This is the "thin" description of rationality implied by Hume's famous maxim that reason is the slave of the passions. Goals (which may be "reasonable" or just plain silly) are kept separate from the means actors use to pursue them; the passions, in short, do not cloud our instrumentally rational pursuit of the goals they stipulate.

There are two varieties of IR:

2A. Descriptive Instrumental Rationality (DIR). DIR is the classic instrumental rationality of rational choice theory, imported from economics. *As a matter of fact,* says the DIR theorist, *human beings seek the best means to achieve their goals, i.e., the means best suited to satisfy their considered preferences.* In its strongest form, the DIR theorist claims that social actors pursue their preferences along the route they see as the most promising (and "cost effective") way of getting to their destination. In its weaker form, the DIR theorist admits that perhaps not all human behavior lives up to the high standards posited by instrumental rationality, but that we have to assume that it does, for the most part, if we are to theorize and do empirical research in the social sciences. Thus, we can speak of "literal" and "methodological" versions of DIR.

2A1. Descriptive Selfish Instrumental Rationality (DSIR). One version of descriptive rationality posits that people habitually use instrumental means to seek selfish ends. This is DSIR, which can be broken down into two versions: one (DSIR-m) defines the selfish ends that human beings supposedly seek as material goods, mostly financial ones; while another (DSIR-u) merely stipulates that selfish ends involve "objects of pleasure," utilitarian goals in a broader sense.

2B. Prescriptive Instrumental Rationality (PIR). PIR is the claim that people *ought to* instrumentally pursue their considered preferences, come hell or high water. It is the importation of *Homo economicus* from the realm of economic theory into that of normative discourse.

As with its descriptive cousin, we can also imagine a Prescriptive Selfish Instrumental Rationality (PSIR), which tells us that we should seek selfish goals by the most efficient means possible.

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3A. Descriptive Teleological Rationality (DTR). Like DIR, DTR describes human action as rational, but this is rationality in the sense of contributing to reaching humanity's inevitable historical destination, which the theorist defines as rational. Examples are Christian eschatology, Condorcet's dream of democratic liberation in the coming tenth epoch of history, Hegel's claim that history is moving toward rational freedom, and Marx's claim that the historical evolution of the class struggle will lead to a revolution against capitalism that will inaugurate a golden age of equality and prosperity. The rational is real, and the real is rational. Individuals may participate in reaching the rational telos; but by and large, their participation is engulfed by the cunning of reason in a broader social process.

3B. Prescriptive Teleological Rationality (PTR). The PTR theorist advocates moving toward some social goal defined by the theorist as rational, even though this goal is not in any sense inevitable. For instance, a liberal might say that we have a moral duty to build a society where tolerance, freedom, and human decency prevail.

An exclusively social-structuralist understanding of social theory might lead to DTR. Indeed, DTR may have a natural tendency to ally itself with strict social structuralism, as we can see quite clearly in Marx and Engels's historical materialism. But any serious attention paid to subjective reason (whether systemic or more rigorously instrumental) will surely lead us away from embracing DTR. A purely teleological account of rationality is best left to the prophets (DTR) and moralists (PTR).

This leaves as the real issue the question of whether there is any need to move from thin, systemic rationality toward a thicker instrumental rationality. Following in the footsteps of Weber, Collingwood, and Peter Winch, I will contend that we need to posit systemic rationality if we are to understand the intentions of social actors so as to explain (as opposed to merely describing) human action. But even within the realm of intentionality, there is more than pure instrumentality, including what Michael Taylor (1995) calls "normative" and "expressive" behavior, social identification, and intrinsic motivation.[2] And at the level of "meaning," instrumentally rational behavior loses even more ground to unconscious impulses, normative and expressive behavior, and the like. When we arrive at the level of social structures, moreover, all we really have to work with is systemic rationality, the idea that people do things for reasons. The logic of collective action involves much more than the instrumental pursuit of clearly understood and ordered preferences. So-

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cial forces shape our actions in a variety of preconscious and unconscious ways by impelling, cajoling, or forcing us to accept what I will term *structural ideals* (roughly speaking, group norms) that guide our actions in myriad circumstances.

Intention

For Weber (1978, 4), we can speak of a social action only insofar as the actor attaches a subjective meaning to his or her action. Part of this subjective meaning is one's perception of the attitudes and actions of others. Human intentionality on this level of analysis is univalent in the following sense: the observer must accept the actor's own definition of the intention behind the act. There is no depth to be plumbed in the analysis of intentionality. Although the *meaning* of an action may refer to something lying below the surface of an actor's stated reason(s) for acting, the actor's *intention* is simply the statement of that reason. Thus intentionality presupposes systemic rationality.

Building on this Weberian foundation, Peter Winch (1958) notes that understanding the *meaning* of what was done is an act of interpretation akin to trying to make intelligible what was said. More recently, Anthony Giddens (1982, 49) has pointed out that if we want to connect human action with structural explanation we need a theory of the human agent or subject, an account of the conditions and consequences of actions, and an interpretation of "structure" as somehow produced by, or producing, these conditions and consequences. This is almost truistic unless we add that the "theory of the human subject" should have a dual nature, covering both intentionality and meaning, if it is to be a complete theory and if it is going to be able to provide a link to social structure.

Human intentions, however, are not discrete things. It would be more proper to say, following Giddens (1986, 543), that there is a context of intentionality and practice that "saturate" any given social product. Thought and social interaction are processes, not collections of atomic units, although the analyst must, to some degree, treat them atomistically to get on with her analysis. Furthermore, as Giddens (1982, 31) reminds us, intentional thought and interaction are also processes that take place in the *durée* of everyday life. Each decision, thought, or action that we can isolate from the others surrounding it so as to reflect upon it is, all the same, saturated with the physiological

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grounding, emotive coloring and mental logic of its neighbors when experienced in its immediate and original location in time/space.

Consciousness is intentional insofar as it is directed toward objects, whether physical or ideal. For the purposes of understanding a section of the flux of consciousness and the way consciousness is played out in social acts, it is useful to introduce an "analytical atom" upon which the social theorist can focus. This atom I will call *the phenomenological moment.* It is an act or series of acts that the social theorist accords unity for heuristic purposes. It is a slice of space/time containing a discrete quantum of human interaction. The size of this slice varies according to the interests and purposes of the social theorist. Within each such moment, we can discern the intention/meaning/structure network.

A given phenomenological moment can be understood synchronically, as crossing the three elements of our theoretical network at a given point in time. Or it can be understood diachronically, within one level of analysis alone (say, just in terms of the actors' intentions), by showing how it is connected to prior and later moments in the same local series. For the social theorist, then, history and sociology are methodologically indistinguishable, although they are too often assigned the separate tasks of analyzing social diachrony and synchrony, respectively, in the academic division of labor. A full analysis of a given phenomenological moment should include both history and sociology (at least taken in its structuralist mode).

An interesting analysis of a province of intentional discourse comes from Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman (1968), who discuss the "accounts" people attempt to give of their untoward behavior. They divide these accounts between excuses and justifications, detailing several types of each. Their more general point is that the success or failure of an account offered to a given group, subculture, etc., will depend in part on the background expectations of all parties involved (including the person offering the account and those listening to it). The point that Scott and Lyman make with respect to accounts can be generalized: the "success" or "failure" of actions often depends on a correct reading by the actor(s) of the background expectations, or structural ideals, relevant to the situation. Thus the success of intentional discourse can to a large degree be measured by the social meanings attributed to it by its intended audience, with these meanings being themselves, to some degree, structural products. When the wrong meaning is attached to a given discursive effort, it may doom the actor to being misunderstood or ignored.

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As I've already mentioned, at the level of a strictly intentional account of human behavior, we must assume at least systemic rationality for human action to make any sense at all. John Ferejohn and Debra Satz (1995, 78–79) go a step farther, claiming that intentional explanation must be privileged in the social sciences; only thus can we achieve the (partial) universalism—the discernment of universal behavioral laws—that they hope for. This is part of their attempt to situate rational choice theory—which they see as a mild version of what I call descriptive instrumental rationality (DIR)—at the center of political science. However, even if we assume that intentionality is central in social explanation, it is a rather large category error to leap to the conclusion that we must give any explanatory privilege to DIR. Even acts with clear intentions behind them do not always aim to achieve their goals along instrumentally rational paths. Our core values and our passions (not to mention our social identifications) too often cloud the sunny skies of the pretended utility maximizer. As Robert Abelson (1995, 27) notes, the instrumental state of mind is part of a broader mindset that can be switched on and off at different times, and different people have different mixtures of instrumental and noninstrumental orientations.[3]

Herbert Blumer's presentation of the premises of symbolic interactionism serves as a useful methodological sextant with which to navigate our way from intentionality to meaning.

> (i) Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them.
>
> (ii) The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
>
> (iii) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, the interpretative process the person uses in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer 1969, 2)

Blumer castigates positivists and functionalists for failing to go directly to the empirical social world in their work (32). This critique is especially well taken (although any attack on functionalism today might seem to be little more than a red herring) on the level of intentionality, for it is easiest to get at the actual reasons actors have (or would give, if asked) for their actions by asking them directly, or by using reliable written accounts of their actions.[4] While intentionality always exists in concrete human social interactions that are, themselves, mediated by the

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meanings brought to these interactions, part of this meaning is the stated (or statable) conscious intention of the actor.[5]

Other parts of this meaning, however, are things like the unconscious drives of human actors, their metaphysical and ideological presuppositions, the social space and "spirit of the age" in which the action takes place, and the unintended consequences of the action. All of these sources of meaning (and others, too) are tied to, but in some way transcend, the intentionality of the individual. It is true, as Giddens (1979, 5) notes, that all actors enjoy some degree of "discursive penetration" of the society in which they live. They are aware, on the level of discursive consciousness, of the social rules of the game. But this awareness is inevitably less than total, both because of cognitive limitations on the individual's awareness of all the discursive knowledge there is out there, and because her awareness is channelled or dammed up by the unconscious mind, her basic presuppositions, the limited social and mental space in which her actions take place, and the unintended consequences of her actions.[6]

Imagine Tom, an impressionable young undergraduate at a local university; and Mary, a professional woman in a dual-income suburban family. Within each of their social worlds, they intend to be "successful." Tom is trying to maintain his straight-A average, which is a means to the end of the career in accounting he has set as one of his life goals. Mary, a middle-level manager at a large company, is trying to climb the corporate ladder, primarily so she can earn a higher salary. Both are engaged in instrumentally rational thinking and action.

But on another level, whenever Tom encounters Professor X at school, he automatically and unconsciously treats him with deference or formal respect. Similarly, when Mary encounters a police officer on the street, she accords him the same sort of respect. Built into these interactions are subjective intentions, of course, but also something more. The formal respect paid to authority figures is a sort of *status*. The intentions of each actor explain only in part why they accord people this type of status. Nor is there, except in part, an instrumentally rational explanation for this respect (Tom's desire to get a good mark in his course with Professor X; Mary's desire to maintain good relations with the police). In each case, status *expresses* a normative acceptance of the respective institutions receiving the respect (the university and the police force).

Tom may even ridicule Professor X behind his back for his clumsy and forgetful manner, but he abandons this disrespectful attitude in the

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professor's presence. His respect is "structural" in the sense that it is shared by Tom with most, if not all, of his fellow undergraduates as a given that is ingrained in their practical consciousness. Its "meaning" may reflect on someone's public character ("He's such a polite young man"), on someone's upbringing, on an unconscious projection of a stern and scolding father-image onto the professor, etc. Yet both the meaning and the structure of people's respect for authority figures are tied to the phenomenological moments when they encounter these figures in a given time and place, i.e., when they interact with them, whether passively (e.g., by avoiding the professor's office when Tom's assignment is late) or actively (e.g., by politely asking a traffic cop for directions when Mary is lost).

A simple and common feeling such as respect for authority can be multidimensional when we try to bring it into the realm of social theory. We can enter into any of the common notions associated with social interaction on any of the three levels (intentions, meaning, or social structure), and from that entry point we can extend our analysis into the other two levels. At the same time, we can see not only instrumental rationality at work in the social phenomenon of respect, but also elements of expressive and normative behavior, not to mention social solidarity. None of the three levels of analysis has any special privilege, either methodologically or chronologically, although it seems more pragmatic to start with the subjective intentions of the actor(s) in explaining "what happened" in a given case because (a) this avoids the holist bias endemic to some social science, and (b) we are both morally and epistemologically obliged to take into account the individual actors' view of themselves *before* we impose any social meanings or structures upon that self-understanding.

When the social theorist digs into a given social act, all three strata of explanation are simultaneously available if she works hard enough to get at them. The stratum investigated depends on the particular interests of the theorist, though a complete archaeology of a social act should investigate all three strata rather than ignoring the rubble covering his or her primary object of interest (as Schliemann did at Troy).

Meaning

When we leave the conscious intentions of the actor behind and ask, "What is the meaning of her action?", we are forced to consider a se-

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ries of bivalent sources of that meaning. These include (although this list is by no means exhaustive) conscious intentions vs. unconscious drives, conscious and truthfully stated intentions vs. conscious but falsely stated intentions (lies), intended vs. unintended consequences, the prior conditions of the act of which the actor was aware versus those of which the actor was not aware, and the actor's reflexive interpretation of her own past actions versus others' interpretations of it.

"Meaning" encompasses both sides of each of these binary pairs. Weber (1978, 6) claims that actions that cannot be related to an intended purpose are devoid of meaning, but two pages later tells us that there are two types of understanding (*Verstehen*): direct observational understanding and explanatory understanding. The latter mode of *Verstehen* is what he terms the "rational" understanding of motivation, which involves "placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning" (8).[7] Leaving aside the questionable validity of a separate "direct observational" understanding of a social act, my claim is that explanatory understanding is analytically distinct from an understanding of the actor's intentions, and can be better understood in terms of an analysis of the "meaning" of the act.

As Frank Parkin (1982, 26) points out, in one sense *Verstehen* seems to be based on the idea that actors are typically aware of their motives and of their subjective states of mind, leaving no place for notions of "false consciousness." Yet Weber himself (1978, 21) admits that only rarely is the subjective meaning of an action present in the consciousness of the actor:

> The theoretical concepts of sociology are ideal types not only from the objective point of view, but also in their application to subjective processes. In the great majority of cases actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning. The actor is more likely to "be aware" of it in a vague sense than he is to "know" what he is doing or be explicitly self-aware about it.

This tension between the intentional and the unintentional can be dispelled if we are willing to accept meaning as a separate category from intention. Meaning can go beyond the strictly intentional to the unintended and the unconscious.

The unintentional aspect of subjective meaning leads us back to Blumer and symbolic interactionism. The premise of interactionism is

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Winch's observation that our social relations with our fellows are permeated with ideas about reality, such that social relations can be seen as ideas about (social) reality (Winch 1958, 22). Blumer (1969, 10) moves forward from this Wittgensteinian premise to suggest that the "worlds" we live in consist of "objects" created by symbolic interaction. Human life is one vast process of forming, sustaining, and transferring these social objects, which have no fixed status unless their meaning is continuous (ibid., 12). The social object is the focal point for the production of any meaning in a social act over and above that contained in the conscious intention of the actor.[8] The social meaning of an object, for example this essay, cannot be exhausted by even a thorough examination of the agent's intentions in writing it. It is a social object at all only insofar as others read their own meanings into it (keeping in mind that in the present case, these meanings might parallel quite closely my own in writing it), and also insofar as we allow the circumstances (including biographical, political, and economic) of its production to be part and parcel of its social meaning. We can speak of what the author "meant to say" in a given text, but also of what that text "means" in the greater context of her life; of the "historical meaning" of the work; or even of what the ideas contained in the text "meant" in the lives of its readers. That is, unlike an actor's intentions, the meaning of a social object must be *interpreted* (either reflectively by the actor, or by someone else, such as the theorist).

Therefore, the sociology of knowledge is vital to an understanding of the "meaning" of social acts. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966, 1) take as their basic premise the notion that reality is socially constructed, and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process whereby this occurs. For the sociologist of knowledge, the central focus, over and above any concern with intellectual history, must be the world of common-sense knowledge: the knowledge that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist (ibid., 14). The world of everyday life has a paramount reality, and is organized around the "here" of my body and the "now" of my present (ibid., 21–22). The analysis of this here and now has become an important part of sociology and history in the last 20 years, fueled in large part by feminism and postmodernism, and especially by Michel Foucault's archaeologies of knowledge and genealogies of the enchained body.

Our understanding of the world of everyday knowledge requires us to move beyond the stated intentions of the social actors to the practical knowledge and unconscious processes that sustain everyday life. The

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social self is in a continual process of construction through the attribution of significance (i.e., meaning) by all those in contact with that self from moment to moment. The evaluative aspect of this construction of the self ebbs and flows, depending on the words and actions of the actor. Our practical awareness of "how to do things" is what Berger and Luckmann (1966, 43) call "recipes" for the mastery of routine problems. Uncovering the recipes embedded in practical activities is a large part of what I mean by reconstructing the "meaning" of a social action. Needless to say, the actor may know how to use a recipe without being able to formulate it explicitly. This analysis of "recipes" is one of the central tasks of social theory insofar as it seeks to produce a phenomenology of everyday life.

Without getting too deeply into the question of the social construction of the self, it is important to remember that our self-image and our image of others is the end product of a never-ending process of reflecting reflected images.[9] We see ourselves as reflections of the way others talk about us and act toward us, which influences our future performances, which in turn influences the way others will either maintain or revise their images of us. The social meaning of individual acts is usefully seen as tied to a series of performances given within the framework of an infinitely reflexive (and, as Christopher Lasch reminds us, sometimes narcissistic) construction of the self. This construction takes place largely by means of images communicated from the others present in the collection of phenomenological moments we call everyday life.

Weber (1978, 9) saw hidden "motives" and repressions as one of the limits on the understanding of subjective meaning.[10] These were subaqueous formations inaccessible to the surface-sailing social theorist. But as Giddens (1986, 536, 538) notes, we must trace the origins of social meaning to the methodological apparatus embedded in the "practical consciousness" of the routines of day-to-day life. This practical consciousness, this preconscious sense of how to do things, acts for Giddens as a link between the conscious and the unconscious. Both our practical consciousness and our unconscious drives enter into any full account of the meaning of a given phenomenological moment. Although the stated intentions of the actor have a certain methodological primacy, we must further come to understand the practical knowledge that allows (or fails to allow) her to complete the act, along with the possibility that our awareness of the actor's unconscious impulses might help us to more fully comprehend the context of her intentions and there-

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fore the *meaning* of her action. Thus a complete theory of mind for the social theorist would see the meaning of social actions as the product of (a) intentional consciousness, (b) practical consciousness, and (c) unconscious drives.

The Postmodern Error

Social theorists notoriously argue over the "meaning" of social actions. This lack of agreement has led to the postmodernist refusal to search for the "true" significance of behavior. The social world is one great text for them, full of signs, all of which can be read in a variety of ways. However, the nonsubjective meaning of an action is not like an empty ship adrift on the ocean, one that can be pulled by the determined tugboat-theorist any which way; it is anchored on the one side by the subjective intentions of the actor and, on the other, by the structural ideals that shaped the act. Although a social epistemology cannot provide a clear and precise formula to guide us to the "objective" meaning of a social action, if we keep ourselves firmly anchored to both intention and social structure we can avoid the postmodernist tendency to drift far out onto the waters of epistemological relativism.

As we escape pure intentionality and move toward interpreting the social meaning of human action, it should become clear that explanations of behavior in terms other than pure instrumental rationality have to be considered. Specifically, part of the "meaning" of a social action is its expression of values, class or other social group solidarity (or lack thereof), or some motivation of which the actor isn't conscious.

Yet when we look for the social meaning of an action, we can begin to talk about a *limited* sense of teleological rationality as part of social explanation. Jeffrey Friedman (1995) rightly suggests (in line with a number of other critics of rational choice theory) that instrumental rationality is a "learned" way of thinking that is largely accepted in economic life, but is seen as less than holy in the political arena. Friedman (ibid., 15) goes on to applaud a *Verstehende* approach to social science, calling for a "transcendent critique that would historicize, as the contingent products of Western rationalism, the strategic maximizing that modern academics may find plausible as a universal explanation simply because we (among others) often engage in it." In short, we should look at instrumental rationality as part of what it "means" to live in the West at the beginning of the twenty-first century, where a narrow economi-

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cally instrumental model increasingly dominates the discourse of daily life (especially media reportage and academic and political debate). This type of rationality can be seen less as hardwired into the central processing unit of human nature, and more as a semiconscious telos for a given group of people in a given place and time.

Another dimension of social meaning is ideology, whether political, economic, or religious. It would be almost trite to claim that an important part of an analysis of the meaning of a social act lies in some understanding of the ideological presuppositions of the actor (or of the theorist, for that matter). But it is true all the same. Let's return to Tom and Mary. Part of the social context of Tom's everyday life is the politically charged atmosphere of the campus he visits five days a week. Feminism, environmentalism, consumerism, and other ideologies influence the way classes are taught, the way students dress and relate to each other, and the way Tom speaks and acts toward those he sees as bearers of different ideological positions. For example, Tom is especially mindful that he does not say anything disrespectful of women when in the presence of his friend Jane, because he is quite attracted to her (the meaning of his acts being influenced by a strong biological drive) and because he knows that she is a radical feminist and will thus not tolerate the "looser" language that Tom's male friends use. His "stable and ordered preference" is to sleep with Jane, and he adjusts his behavior so as not to offend her. Moreover, even though, deep down, Tom is a *laissez-faire* relativist on moral and religious issues (thus proving Alan Bloom right about university undergraduates)—according others the right to believe whatever they see fit, as long as they do not try to impose their beliefs on him—he reacts with some degree of genuine horror at politically incorrect expressions of sexism and racism. In short, Tom is ideologically confused: his behavior is a mixture of instrumentally rational motivations ("Yes, you're absolutely right Jane!") and normative goals ("We should all love each other, regardless of race, religion, or culture.")

Mary, however, is in quite another boat. Although herself openly sympathetic to feminism, she works in the competitive environment of the middle management of a large corporation, where both men and women are in positions of authority. Many of her fellow managers have no sympathy for her political views, and tell her so to her face, while some of her male colleagues claim that Mary's feminism is just a way of compensating for her lack of success, so far, at climbing the corporate ladder. This infuriates Mary, but at the same time it has taught her that she must shelve her ideological position in most of her everyday rela-

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tionships with her coworkers. Instead she cynically pretends to adopt the ideology of competitive economic individualism favored by those in positions of power in the corporation, while retaining a strong social identification with the women's movement outside her office.

The point of these two brief cases is that the environments in which Tom and Mary work give them a distinct menu of ideological choices. Each is subjected to real restrictions imposed on them by the social structures in which they live and work. The structural ideals of their friends, colleagues, and superiors shape their own ideals and thus their behavior. Of course, our ideological menus may not be so constrained as to exclude our own preferred selections. As is the case in the social construction of the self, the construction of the individual's ideological position is tied to a process of reflecting one's own initial "gut feelings" in the mirror of the world around us, having them reflected back at us through the speech and actions of others, re-evaluating our initial feelings, and so on, *ad infinitum*. In this process of construction, instrumental rationality tells only part of the story: intrinsically held values, along with various social identifications, are also important. When determining the social meaning of an action, however, it is useful to look not only at the actor's stated ideological position but at the ideological "environment" in which she operates, and at any unstated ideological presuppositions influencing her actions (opening the door to the sort of sociology of knowledge to which Marx and Mannheim were sympathetic). Any explanation of the meaning of a social action is less than complete if it fails to address ideology as such a multitextured phenomenon.

Structure

Weber (1978, 6) proposed constructing "ideal types" of purely rational courses of action to help us evaluate how these courses of action are influenced by irrational factors. He also maintained that collective concepts must be treated solely as the result of ways of organizing a collection of particular acts of individual persons (ibid., 13). One of the standard criticisms of Weber is that his focus on subjective meaning prevented him from recognizing the influence of social structures. Talcott Parsons (1947, 20) takes up this criticism in noting that Weber's suspicion of a functionalist approach to social science is based on his sense of the indispensability of an analysis of individual motivation. Yet

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in fact, he often resorted to structural explanations, such as the effect of Protestant beliefs on the development of capitalism.

To resolve this paradox, we can once more look to Weber himself. His notion of the ideal type can be rehabilitated as an everyday mental phenomenon (rather than a theoretical construct) that structures action in a way that transcends individual choice: a *structural ideal.* As R. G. Collingwood points out in *The Idea of History* (1946, 200), the fact that a certain people lives on an island in itself has no effect on its history, but the way they perceive that insularity, as a barrier or as a highway, does matter. The "hard facts" of a situation are the hard facts of the way the actor sees the situation (ibid., 317). When these perceptual "hard facts" are accepted as unquestioned assumptions in a given social group, class, culture, or subculture, we can speak of a structural ideal and thus identify, with varying degrees of certainty, a structuring element.[11] Structural ideals connect agents to the material resources of their society (including financial capital), in turn influencing future structural ideals. Thus we can imagine a web linking material goods to social actors by means of structural ideals (thus is born class, both as a theoretical construct and a practical reality).

To some degree, Pierre Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *doxa* capture what I mean by "structural ideal." However, both of his concepts have their limitations. A *habitus* is a set of ingrained dispositions within a given group or class. Bourdieu (1992, 85) maintains that such dispositions are necessary if objective social structures are to reproduce themselves among individuals who share the same material conditions of existence. Sociology must treat as identical all biological individuals who support the same *habitus,* such that an objective view of a social class has as its object of knowledge not an aggregate of individuals but "the system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structure." Although Bourdieu allows for some diversity of worldviews, for him the history of the individual is never anything but a certain "specification" of the collective history of his group or class; diverse dispositions are seen as *structural variants* of the group or class *habitus* (ibid., 86).

At times Bourdieu's *habitus* acquires all-encompassing causal powers, emptying it of much of its explanatory content. He says that as a system of acquired "generative schemes" adjusts to particular conditions, "the *habitus* engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others" (1992, 95). If he means by this simply that norms or ideals inform social action, then one can

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agree (although without much enthusiasm for his pretended discovery). In this case, *habitus* can be seen as fluid. But if he means that people working within a given *habitus* are rigidly controlled and directed by it, and that it is fairly stable (which I don't think Bourdieu would want to say, although he sometimes comes close to doing so), then we would have to abandon his view as a form of structural determinism that tries to sweep under the carpet the thought-side of action, reducing intentionality to a mere function of systemic variables.

Doxa is Bourdieu's term for the naturalization of the arbitrariness of a given social order in the mind and body of a social agent. He writes (1992, 164) that when there is a quasi-perfect fit between the objective social order and subjective principles of organization, "the natural and social world appears as self-evident." Thus, "the world of tradition is experienced as a 'natural world' and taken for granted." *Doxa* become orthodoxies when challenged by nonbelievers. What I mean by structural ideals would have to include *doxa*, orthodoxy, and heterodoxy, as all three can structure social thought and action.

The "structural" component of social explanation takes into account the way social forces affect behavior (keeping in mind that social forces exist for the most part only in terms of certain ideals being accepted as *doxa* by the actors in question). Needless to say, these structural elements tend to flow into each other in the concrete analysis of a given social act. It is useful to bring in Giddens's concept of the *duality of structure* at this point. According to Giddens (1986, 533), social structures should be seen as both the media and the outcome of the human actions they recursively organize. Social agents are able to carry out their day-to-day activities only by instantiating certain structural properties, or, to use my terminology, by invoking or applying (whether consciously, unconsciously, or on the level of practical consciousness) a network of structural ideals.[12] Structure thus influences the individual actor through the sort of collective concepts that Weber was so suspicious of. When these ideals become sufficiently spread out and temporally durable, we can begin to use concepts like "class," "subculture," or "nation."

As Giddens (1979, 9) notes, institutions can be seen as the structured social practices followed by most people in a given place and time. We can thus see an institution like the university as a spatiotemporal meeting point of the social practices (teaching, research, going to the pub, etc.) of a loosely defined but more-or-less regular body of actors (students, faculty, staff). The "structure" of these practises exists in the gen-

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eral notions that each group of actors brings to the situation, within a given space (the campus) over a span of time (e.g., a lecture hour).

On one level, structure has only a virtual reality (Giddens 1979, 9). We cannot concretely identify a structural element such as "class"; we can only indicate the beliefs, practices, and material signs that point to its "existence." All the same, structures seem quite real to most actors. For example, in a society with striking differentiations of wealth, poverty is a real constraint on free thought and action. It may be true that property is a legal "notion" that is sustained by symbolic interactions, but the "virtuality" of inequalities in its distribution melts away when the social actor begins to worry about paying next month's rent. The reality of a concept like poverty exists in its ideational sedimentation in political and economic ideologies, in the legal system, and in everyday economic interactions.

Indeed, the most important structural ideals may be those that organize, distribute, and legitimize the physical and informational objects we call "property"—a regional structure of control that, as Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith, William Robertson, and John Millar were the first to emphasize, dominates many other regional structures of control (including the laws, political ideologies, and forms of government and public administration). Where social groups blindly or subserviently accept as obvious truths ideals about property that structure their lives, we have discovered an instance of the operation of hegemonic power—the ideological substructure of what is commonly termed "economic" or "political" power. More broadly, one could define "power" as the capacity of an individual or group to compel another individual or group to accept certain structural ideals as valid.

A parallel to the way that structural ideals influence everyday action can be seen in Erving Goffmann's discussion of how impressions of reality are fostered by our public performances. As human beings, our impulses, moods, and so forth vary over time, but we are expected in our social performances to exhibit a more regular picture of ourselves to those around us, which requires a certain "bureaucratization of the spirit" (Goffmann 1959, 56). The social actor feels a strong obligation to appear in a steady moral light, to be an effective "merchant of morality" whose wares are known and trusted by those who consume her performances (ibid., 251). The self is a collection of dramatically staged public performances. These performances help to create the nebulous structure we call "character."

The tendency to bureaucratize one's actions, to produce a pattern of

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activities that point to a coherent, core self, is accomplished partly by instantiating a coterie of structural ideals in everyday thinking and acting. We choose certain qualities, virtues, and tastes as distinctly "ours" at a given point in our lives, and we act so as to "impress" the reality of this construction of our self on those around us. One result is that other people use phrases like "she's such a nice woman," "he's a hard worker," and "your taste in music is exquisite." Lévi-Strauss (1969, 28) tells us that just as music makes the individual conscious of his physiological rootedness, mythology makes one aware of one's roots in society. With the caveat that Lévi-Strauss was wrong to see structure as operating independently of individual human motivation, we can see our structural ideals as the modern "myths" that give us a sense of rootedness in everyday life. If someone rejects key elements of these myths, we term her an "outsider," a rebel, or, in the extreme, "mentally ill." The social theorist does not have to be concerned so much with the moral truth or falsity of these myths/ideals, but with the epistemological question of their content, their influence, and the way they change over time. The analysis of social structure is equally a sociological and an historical pursuit.

At the structural level of social explanation we leave instrumental rationality behind. When "social forces" influence behavior, they work, almost by definition, in the province of values and identifications of which actors are only partly conscious. People's ethics, political affiliations, styles of dress, codes of deportment, and definitions of economic self-interest are structured by various ideals of which they are only dimly aware (unless they engage in an intensive process of self-examination). These ideals don't work by presenting actors with menus of choices, each with its own distinct costs and benefits; instead, they define the menus themselves, or, to speak more accurately, they structure which items on the menu the social actor takes seriously, and which ones the actor automatically discounts.

Let's pay one last visit to Tom and Mary. Tom's life is structured in space and time by the social practices of university life. He may bring with him to the university certain class or cultural ideals, and these may continue to influence his actions in part, but the university tends to generate its own structural ideals. These include lecture timetables, the attitude of respect that is generally expected by most professors from students, and the sense that education has a positive value either in itself or as a means to the future end of employment.

Further, Tom subconsciously imbibes modes of dress and ways of

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speaking that reflect his status as a stylish male undergraduate at the turn of the century. He wears a Nike cap and shoes and brand-name jeans and sports an earring, a stylistic ensemble that expresses his solidarity with the mock nonconformity of his friends. As Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and others at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies showed in the 1970s, such ensembles express various forms of subcultural identity.[13] In the interval between childhood and the working world of the adult, Tom wishes to be part of a subculture that defies what he sees as the dull conformity of middle-class suburban life. Ironically, his identity with this subculture is expressed in modes of dress and deportment that are given to him in the form of structural ideals he blindly accepts: he is, in short, just as much the "victim" of social forces as the rest of his undergraduate male friends. In short, although Tom chooses his way of being for a variety of reasons, some of which he can articulate (i.e., he is systemically rational), this way of being is given to him by structural ideals not of his own making (i.e., he is plugged into a sort of teleological rationality of which he is only dimly aware).

Mary's corporate environment is perhaps more rigorously structured in terms of organizing its employees in space and time, while it, too, hands out status and respect differentially to various strata by means of a set of structural ideals its members generally accept (or at least act in accordance with). We can speak of her corporation as being part of a capitalist economic structure insofar as it exists in a network of regular (often competitive) interactions with other conglomerations of actors with similar structural ideals. Mary's primary motivation in working for her employer is money, with a tip of her cap to social status. But she, like Tom, presents her body in a specific stylistic ensemble that articulates her acceptance of the structural ideals of her professional position and class. She may dress in power suits and tight skirts, her hair tied back as if to symbolize the aerodynamic efficiency of her physical self, and thus of her performance on the job. This ensemble also expresses her social identification and normative connection with corporate life. Further, she revels in the gossipy chit-chat about who's on the way up and who's on the way down within the corporate hierarchy. In fact, this attention to hierarchy may allow her to integrate her feminism into her work life by being a tireless advocate of employment equity and of more women in the boardroom. If one were to ask Mary about all of this, she would explain her actions in terms of instrumental and normative reasons (i.e., money and sexual solidarity). Yet, like Tom, the net-

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work of structural ideals (of dress, deportment, organizational rules, and ideology) within which she lives and works is not of her own making.

Tom and Mary's intentions govern their social acts, but the social theorist understands these intentions as having certain meanings that sometimes come together to produce certain structures. These structures, taken as real by other actors, in turn influence future intentions in an endless feedback loop.

A social explanation framed solely in terms of social structures is an unnecessarily reductive enterprise. The consciousness of actors and the meaning of their actions always lurks in the shadows of social structural explanations, and we lose (perhaps for the sake of a single-minded theoretical simplicity) much of the richness of social explanation if we fail to go beyond the level of structure. Structure is not a *deus ex machina* that we can wheel in whenever we are puzzled by a given set of social events. All the same, social theorists should retain structural explanation as an important weapon in their theoretical arsenal if they hope to explain fully what happened in a given phenomenological moment—provided that they remind themselves once in a while that a deterministic structure that exists wholly independent of individual consciousnesses is nothing more than an occult quality.

We need an account of the individual intentions of social actors. But we also need an account of the social meaning of their actions, and an account of the social structures woven into individual intentions and social meanings. These three levels of explanation are separate only as virtual realities. In any concrete phenomenological moment they are inextricably intertwined. Thus we need a regulative and heuristic concept such as "structural ideals" to explain how social structure is inculcated in individual acts and in the meanings both the actors and the theorist ascribe to those acts.

NOTES

1. Of course, these "shared" ideas are adhered to differently by different people within a collectivity; also, individuals may adhere only to certain elements within a congerie of ideas concerning a given social object. For example, the average suburbanite might *generally speaking* share the ideal of a "law-and-order" society, but upon occasion may speed or smoke marijuana. The policeman might be less lenient on such matters, the college student more so.
2. Taylor takes issue with rational choice theorists when they attempt to explain behavior that attempts to actualize values (i.e. normative behavior) as "prefer-

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ences" motivated by various "incentives." Instead he sees such behavior as expressive of a "self" that is committed to these values. Robert Abelson (1995, 27) agrees with this critique of rational choice theory. He defines expressive behavior as the "spontaneous enjoyment of value-expressive action, performed for its own sake, with no apparent rational consideration of material consequences for the actor." As both Taylor and Abelson point out, much social and political behavior can be explained only in expressive or normative terms.

3. Indeed, people who consistently exhibit selfish instrumental rationality in their everyday dealings with others tend eventually to be shunned as manipulators or users. It can by no means be assumed that an unsullied SIR is a superior social survival strategy.
4. Blumer's interactionism is such an effective bridge from intentionality to meaning in part because he himself does not rely on just the actor's "word," i.e., on intentions, to get at the "meaning" of a social act.
5. However, we must be aware of Bourdieu's critique of interactionism here. He chastises the interactionists for failing to realize that the truth of the interaction is never contained entirely in the interaction: "In fact it is their present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of *social position* and hence of the social distance between objective positions" (Bourdieu 1992, 81–82). Elsewhere, he makes the associated point that the whole social structure is present in each linguistic interaction, a fact ignored by interactionists, who treat each interaction as a closed world (idem 1991, 67). Needless to say, the important question here is just *how* we carry these social structures within us.
6. Under the rubric of unintended consequences we can distinguish two distinct types: those consequences that were merely unanticipated, which we might call *surface unintended consequences*, and the consequences of those events of which we have no consciousness but that affect social reality all the same, or *deep unintended consequences.* Both the surface and deep unintended consequences of our actions force social theory away from strictly intentional accounts of human behavior toward an account of the social meaning of that behavior, and eventually, I believe, toward an account of structural ideals (or at least some concept with the same denotative content).
7. Of course, prior to the use of *Verstehen*, Weber outlined social explanations that were adequate at the level of causation, i.e., explanations that outlined general empirical regularities: "Events of the type 'A' tend to cause events of the type 'B'." For Weber, these explanations were necessary for social understanding, but not sufficient.
8. Bourdieu (1992, 79) agrees, saying that each social agent, "wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning," and that her actions are the product of a *modus operandi* of which they have no conscious mastery, containing an "objective intention" that always outruns their conscious intentions. He concludes that because social agents do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing, what they do has more meaning than they know.

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9. Under Goffmann's dramaturgical model of how the self is presented on the stage of everyday life, the individual's goal is to control the conduct of others by controlling their definition of the situation (Goffmann 1959, 3–4). This way of looking at everyday life may accord people too much intentionality, in that they are always trying to "con" their audience (i.e., one cannot figure out their "true" intentions from their stated motives). Goffmann's analysis leads him to the interesting conclusion that the self is not so much an organic thing with a specific location but a *dramatic effect* arising diffusely from the scene presented, and is thus a thing of collaborative manufacture (ibid., 252–53).
10. Motives, in everyday language, can be either conscious or unconscious, acknowledged or hidden. A conscious and acknowledged motive, such as "I went to work today to make money," is synonymous with an intention. But Weber means here an unconscious, hidden motive, the sort that we are reluctant to acknowledge or that we simply repress.
11. As I said earlier, they are a generalized version of Scott and Lyman's "background expectations" for accounts.
12. A section of these ideals are what Berger and Luckmann (1966, 33) call the continuum of typifications of everyday life, whereby others are encountered as "typifying" some quality, trait, etc. (in Berger and Luckmann's example, Henry the "typical" Englishman).
13. See Hall and Jefferson 1976 and Hebdige 1979.

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David Ciepley

DEMOCRACY DESPITE VOTER IGNORANCE: A WEBERIAN REPLY TO SOMIN AND FRIEDMAN

ABSTRACT: *Ilya Somin finds in the public's ignorance of policy issues a reason to reduce the size and scope of government. But one cannot restrict the range of issues that may be raised in a democracy without it ceasing to be a democracy. Jeffrey Friedman argues that, since feedback on the quality of private goods is superior to feedback on the quality of public policies, "privatizing" public decisions might improve their quality. However, the quality of feedback depends upon the nature of the good, not who provides it; and the absence of reliable feedback on a good may actually justify government involvement, to correct information asymmetries. More fundamentally, voter ignorance of policy issues is a problem only if we assume that the point of democracy is to secure voter control of policy. Max Weber, however, advocated democracy as the best available mechanism for securing strong and responsible leadership.*

In the most recent issue of *Critical Review* (Vol. 12, No. 4), Ilya Somin ("Voter Ignorance and the Democratic Ideal") and Jeffrey Friedman ("Introduction: Public Ignorance and Democratic Theory") find in the public's gross political ignorance distinct yet compatible reasons for reducing the size and scope of government. For Somin, the point of limiting government's scope is, paradoxically, to *strengthen* democ-

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David Ciepley, Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago, 5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, IL 60637, e-mail ciep@midway.uchicago.edu, thanks Jeffrey Friedman and Peter J. Wang for helpful comments, and the Institute for Humane Studies for a Humane Studies Fellowship, which partly supported the writing of this paper.

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racy. By lowering the "information burden" of becoming politically informed, he writes, "a smaller government may actually be more democratic than modern mass democracies are, in that voters would stand more chance of being able to influence the policies of a small government in an informed manner" (Somin 1998, 414). For Friedman, however, whose skepticism about the policy competence of the *demos* runs much deeper, even a drastically curtailed policy agenda would not likely receive informed treatment from the voting public. Friedman makes a strong case that, given the complexity of most major policy issues, even relatively informed voters end up viewing them through the simplifying lens of ideology; and voting on the basis of ideology is not much superior, and potentially is much worse, than voting on the basis of sheer ignorance. Nevertheless, by recasting the public's policy ignorance as a consequence of inadequate information feedback, Friedman finds reason to second Somin's recommendation. Citing Schumpeter's observation that we receive better feedback about the quality of private goods than we do about the quality of political decisions, Friedman suggests taking certain items off the public agenda so they might be more intelligently decided privately and, therefore, with the benefit of more feedback.

In the present essay I will attempt to do two things. First, while remaining agnostic on the general question of the appropriate size and scope of government, I will question the cogency of the *particular* arguments Somin and Friedman advance for limiting it. Second, and more importantly, I will question a premise Somin and Friedman share: that the measure of a democracy is its ability to secure *intelligent voter control of public policy*. If this is its measure, then in my view there is truly no hope for democracy under modern conditions, for all the reasons that Somin and Friedman list and then some. However, lest we succumb to such a conclusion, I draw from Max Weber a rather different measure of democracy—one that focuses on the kind of leaders that the political system recruits and selects. If, as Weber suggests, the general political problem is not one of securing popular control, but of securing responsible and effective leadership, then this is where we should look in evaluating political systems, including representative democracy.

My point is not to defend democracy; that would be otiose, as no one is attacking it. But the kind of rationale one holds for democracy very much influences how one views the problem of public ignorance, and the constitutional implications one draws from it. As it

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turns out, if we follow Weber and shift our focus from the "demand" side to the "supply" side of the electoral process, the public's policy ignorance fades as a problem. To frame a crude example: if a democratic political system presents its electorate with a choice between, say, an Abraham Lincoln and a Winston Churchill, that country is going to be well led, no matter how ignorant the general public is about policy issues. At the same time, the shift in focus brings into view a different range of problems—for example, that democratic politics hasn't been attracting Lincolns and Churchills of late.

The Contradictions in Constraining Democracy

Somin marshals an impressive battery of evidence showing that voters know far too little—about the issues, about the policy positions of candidates, about policy consequences, and about the structure of government—to make the kinds of causal connections between candidates and outcomes necessary for intelligent control of public policy. What is more, he provides powerful and largely convincing arguments showing that the "information shortcuts" that are reputed to generate informed voting—party affiliations, retrospective voting, issue publics, cues from opinion leaders, and the like—fail to overcome the problem, and in some cases make it worse. In light of this evidence and argument, Somin (1998, 414) concludes fairly that "the American electorate fails to meet even the most minimal criteria [of] adequate voter knowledge" necessary for intelligent voter control of public policy.

Yet Somin comes not to bury democracy, but to save it. The problem with democracy as we know it is that the voter is asked to bear too heavy a knowledge burden. However, it is not democracy per se, but the size of government, that is the culprit. "The size and scope of the modern state is so great that it is impossible for voters—even the most knowledgeable among them—to be adequately informed about all its operations" (Somin 1998, 414). With the problem framed in this manner, a solution immediately recommends itself: "the depth and apparent intractability of current levels of [political] ignorance strongly suggest that democratic control requires a government far more limited in scope than what we have today" (ibid., 446). As things stand today, voters are too ignorant to exert intelligent democratic control over public policy, so we would actually *strengthen*

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democracy if we limited the purview of government to a few central issues.

This is certainly an interesting argument, with much initial plausibility. Somin backs it up with the historical example of antebellum American politics, which by Somin's accounting dealt with fewer issues (he lists "the spread of slavery, the disposition of newly acquired Western lands, the tariff, federal support for infrastructure spending, banking, and on a few occasions, warfare with foreign powers" [Somin 1998, 434]), and dealt with them at a higher level of detail and intelligence, than politics does today. In truth, this example does not serve Somin so well. Friedman, commenting on Somin, challenges the wisdom of the voting public's decisions on many of these issues (ibid., 405–406). To this, I would add that the very notion that American voters faced fewer issues in the nineteenth-century is but an artifact of Somin's singular focus upon *federal* elections. The illusion is immediately dispelled if we turn our attention to state and local politics. If nineteenth-century national politics was streamline Prairie School, nineteenth-century state and local politics was rococo. It was an intensely political age (and not at all an "age of individualism," as our reigning historical mythos has it)—an age in which government, in its *local* incarnations, arguably had *broader* scope than today, involving itself in issues of public morality (including religion), as well as in surprisingly heavy-handed regulation of private property and public space in the name of public health, public safety, and a "well-ordered market."[1]

Of course Somin might pick a different example. But there is a more general problem with his argument that no historical example will rectify. Somin argues that, given how ignorant voters are, and given how little incentive they have for becoming informed (since, considered individually, each voter has little chance of affecting an election's outcome), supporters of democratic control ought to support restricting the scope of government, for this would minimize the range of issues voters would need to decide, which in turn would lower the "cost" of becoming informed. As a general consideration this makes sense. But while urging the democratic benefits that would flow from restricting the purview of government to a few central issues, Somin gives us no suggestion as to *which* issues should be selected for democratic decision, or *how* they should be selected, or (with one exception) *who* will select them. In the spirit of charity, we might attribute this oversight to limitations of space—at 34 pages,

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Somin's article is already long by present-day journal standards. But I believe Somin would run into terrible difficulties were he to make the attempt, for reasons that would point up the central weakness in his argument.

Here is the problem: it is simply not clear how, in a democracy, one is to restrict the range of issues that the *demos* may legitimately raise. Modern democracy as a political system may be defined as the open competition of candidates for the highest legislative and executive offices (including, crucially, the position of "commander in chief" of the armed forces), with "success" being determined by counting votes. In its very essence, this competition involves the legally free recruitment of followers on *any* platform that can attract their support (Weber 1994, 99). Of course, competition for office isn't a case of anything goes. There are formal legal qualifications for candidacy, as well as formal and informal rules of campaigning (restrictions on the use of violence, on the direct purchase of votes, and so forth)—which is why all democracies must be, implicitly if not explicitly, "constitutional" democracies, with these rules as part of the settled procedures for determining succession. But these rules and procedures are themselves subject to revision, either through "normal" or "constitutional" political processes, and this is the hallmark of being a constitutional *democracy*.

Given this, it is difficult to see how one can restrict the range of issues that may be raised without ceasing to be a democracy altogether. Democracy is not the type of thing that one can take in small doses. Although, in my view, the theory of "popular sovereignty" is bad political metaphysics, in that the *demos* never controls government in anything approaching a literal sense, it does carry an important practical meaning, which is that in a democracy there is no *institutional* authority that, in the final analysis, can set bounds to the political wishes of a determined majority of the voting public.

There is no question that if all public offices and all public policy were settled by direct vote of the body politic, the grossest huckstering, hand-washing, and gridlock would ensue. Let us therefore hope that our democracy remains a self-limiting one. But with democracy, the only *ultimate* restraint is *self-restraint*. This restraint may be born of habit or of conviction; it may follow from laziness and a lack of imagination, or from a principled belief in the "presumptive rationality of custom," or from reverence for the self-imposed restraints articulated at a founding moment. But restrain the scope of democracy by *force*,

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and we are no longer talking about a democratic government, but about a monarchy, or an oligarchy, or some other form of nondemocratic regime that allows, as an indulgence, that certain decisions be made by ballot.

As noted, Somin (1998, 443–44) does tender one suggestion as to *who* might limit the purview of government: the Supreme Court.

> If an "activist" court is able to help reduce the scope of legislative power to the point where the information burden on voters becomes more manageable, the resulting political system might actually be more democratic than one in which legislative power reigns supreme. By this logic, the pre-New Deal Supreme Court—reviled as antidemocratic by liberal and most conservative legal scholars alike . . .—may actually have helped to promote democracy through its efforts to limit the scope of government power.

But the history of the Roosevelt administration's battle with the Court is itself wonderful evidence that a Court's exemption of a social practice from government regulation does not eliminate it as a political issue. In this case, it elevated it! It also shows that Court decisions are at best temporary restraints if they are not seconded by popular acquiescence. *In extremis*, the Constitution can be amended, through a popular amendment process; and even short of amendment, the Supreme Court has proven no match for a legislature and chief executive with overwhelming popular support—which is precisely why the judiciary, of all the branches of the government, bears the moniker "the least dangerous branch."

Perhaps the U.S. Constitution, with its amendment procedures and Court-packing possibilities, is an aberration. Perhaps we should set our eyes on the constitutions of, say, Germany and Japan, which (on U.S. insistence after World War II) entrench certain individual rights as "fundamental law"—and by implication place certain restraints upon democratic action. Perhaps a whole range of restrictions upon government action could be made fundamental, nonamendable law, to be upheld by a vigilant judiciary.

Alas, the only real consequence of such a move would be to sink the authority of the Court and to strip it of all *effective* power of judicial review. As Tocqueville ([1835] 1988, 102) noted with characteristic perspicacity, it is precisely because in America "the nation always can, by changing the Constitution, reduce the judges to obedience" that its judges can be trusted with the otherwise unheard-of power of

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voiding legislation.[2] In France, where the constitution was held to be immutable, judges often laid claim to this power, but it was never tolerated in practice, for it would mean that "the constitution-making power would really be in their hands, as they alone would have the right to interpret a constitution whose provisions no one could change" (ibid., 101). Paradoxically, the attempt to strengthen the judiciary's hand by declaring fundamental law only weakens it, as the gamut of twentieth-century attempts confirms.

In my own view, there are cultural and structural reasons beyond the one Tocqueville cites that help account for the U.S. Supreme Court's prominence in the American constitutional system; but in the final analysis, I believe it must be granted that the Court is only ceded such power as it has because, rightly or not, it is understood to be the interpreter of the *fundamental* will of "We the People."[3] Of course, sometimes it lags behind, and sometimes it outstrips, the prevailing moral sensibilities of the populace. And if it continues to do so for long, it may be brought to heel by other constitutional actors. But this does not make it a force opposed to democracy. In the American mode of popular government, each of the branches of government represents "the People" in a different incarnation—a constitutional arrangement that is designed to rub off the rough edges of "the People" in any single incarnation. The Court is one of these incarnations, and as such becomes a particular manifestation of, and not a limitation upon, American democracy.

Absent any other plausible bridle on the purview of American democracy, Somin will be left with no other power to appeal to but the *demos* itself. But maybe this has been the way forward all along. Somin can simply point out to the *demos* its own policy ignorance, so that the *demos* will limit *itself* for the purpose of reasserting its intelligent control of public policy.

But is it really so simple? As Friedman (1998, 407–408) argues incisively, the relatively high rates of voter turnout that we observe suggest not only that people overestimate the influence of their vote, but also that they overestimate their understanding of the issues. That is, they are so uninformed that they don't know they don't know. What is necessary, therefore, is that citizens first become informed enough to realize that they are underinformed, and then, as a rational response to their own ignorance, agree to limit government for the sake of limiting their own responsibilities as its controllers.

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But striking such a rational agreement would require two things. First, in order to select the right *number* of issues, one needs to know how much one needs to know, over the entire range of plausibly "central" issues, if one is to be a competent judge. And second, in order to select the right *mix* of issues, one needs to find agreement about which of these issues are truly the central ones. But if the public were ever to know this much about the issues, then there would no longer be a problem of public ignorance. Furthermore, even if the *demos* could be brought to this fevered pitch of political knowledge for one magical constitutional moment, there would be no popularly controlled mechanism for changing the mix of central, democratically controlled issues as new problems arise and old ones fade in importance, as invariably happens in dynamic societies of the sort we inhabit. I believe we witness here the implosion of the idea of "voter control" in any literal sense under modern conditions.

If Somin is truly serious about securing popular control of public policy, then what he needs is not a government far simpler than that of today, but a *society* far simpler. Indeed, Somin's obeisance to nineteenth-century American politics, while in my view oversimplifying the legal and political landscape of that period, nevertheless has some resonance for the simple reason that it *was* a simpler age, when "self-rule" could have a more direct meaning. But the increasing complexity of human undertakings, and the great increase in the size of the entities undertaking them (by means of the corporate form), has necessarily increased the number of "policy issues" that any polity confronts. The predominant historical response to this change has been for the central government to assume regulatory functions that were formerly handled by local governments, local courts, and neighborly shaming. But the issues would still be there even if the government withdrew from these tasks. We'd still have to worry about military preparedness, or inequities in access to education, or care for the elderly, even if the government had been removed from the decision-making process in these areas. Thus, from the vantage point of the *demos*, these would remain "policy issues" for the simple reason that, so long as the country remained a democracy, the *demos* would always have to consider the option of putting the government back in the fray. Another way of saying this is that the decision *not* to use government—the decision, say, to use competitive private bureaucracies (firms) or common-law courts—to conduct these matters of public concern is itself a *political* (quasiconstitutional) decision. It requires a

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very complicated comparison of the outcome that government involvement would likely produce versus the outcome produced without it. Thus, if intelligent voter control is our objective, we must confront the unhappy fact, first, that such "negative" decisions, no less than positive decisions, would have to be decided by the *demos* on an *ongoing basis*; second, that the total number of decisions, negative plus positive, remains identical whether the government is big or small; and third, that all of these decisions are equally plagued by the problem of public ignorance. In short, simplicity in the political decisions that would need to be made by a responsible *demos* is *not* to be had through downsizing the government. Therefore, to repeat, if Somin is truly serious about securing popular control of public policy (which, as we have seen, in a democracy necessarily also means, at the limit, popular control of the constitutional and quasiconstitutional structure), then what he needs is not a government far simpler than that of today, but a *society* far simpler, with fewer potential political issues.

I have no reason to believe that this is something Somin would champion. But it would be an understandable longing. My own experience in rural Africa and a Buddhist monastery in rural India, while doubtless very superficial and perfumed with the romanticism of youth, inclines me to believe that life in simple social systems is, in many cases, more fully human than life in our late-industrial societies, and that if it weren't for human vainglory and the desire to be in the midst of things—vices to which I am as subject as any—retreat to such of these social systems as are left would be widespread. But the practical question, given the way the world has gone, is whether a suitably small and simple democratic society could sustain itself today in the competitive geopolitical environment that dominates most of the planet, where everyone else brings to the battlefield the "fruits" of an ever-more-intensive division of labor and capital investment. I very much doubt it.

Uncertain Feedback

Friedman provides another reason to reject the particular solution to the problem of public ignorance offered by Somin. For Friedman, paring down the range of issues to be decided by the public would merely replace wholly ignorant decisions with semi-ignorant, ideological ones—a point which calls to mind a quip of the early twenti-

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eth-century humorist, Josh Billings: It ain't ignorance that's causin' the problems—it's people knowin' so derned much that ain't so. But while disagreeing with Somin's rationale, Friedman has an interesting argument of his own on behalf of shrinking the government.

When it comes to politics, Friedman is an "instrumentalist"—meaning that, for him, a political system (and *a fortiori* democracy) is to be judged by its effectiveness in attaining ultimate values (happiness, truth, beauty), and not by the "rightness" of its means. It is not the *democratic* quality of decision-making that matters, but the quality of decision-making, period. Friedman thus comes at the problem of political ignorance from a direction opposite that of Somin. If democracy can't deliver the goods, so much the worse for democracy; let's try another method.

Friedman's particular insight is that much of the public's ignorance about the consequences of any given public policy can be attributed to the chronic absence of reliable feedback from policy decisions; and following Schumpeter, he draws a contrast between this and the much more reliable feedback that we receive about the quality of private goods.[4]

> If a policy to enhance national defense is enacted and military preparedness declines—itself a matter nobody can directly perceive—is the new policy at fault, or might preparedness have declined even more without it? If unemployment falls (again, an intangible in the aggregate), is the president responsible, or the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, or some exogenous factor? These are questions that even scholars who devote their lifetimes to studying them disagree about. In contrast, when one buys a bad cigarette, one tastes one's mistake immediately; and so it is with many other private decisions. (Friedman 1998, 408–409)

"Perhaps the role of government should be shrunk," Friedman (1998, 409) suggests in light of this contrast, "not because the remaining decisions will be more informed . . . but because the decisions taken off the agenda are likely to be more informed by perceivable feedback when they are 'privatized.'" In a sense, Friedman is offering a solution of his own to the problem of society's increasing complexity—an alternative way to ease the cognitive demands a complex society makes on the individual. Unlike Somin, Friedman seems to understand that altering the size of government will do little to reduce the *range* of issues the individual confronts. His point, rather, is that if

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we leave more decisions to the market, the *information* individuals receive will be better.

The idea is ingenious, and bears a certain resemblance to arguments Austrian-school economists made against the ideal of the centrally planned economy during the "socialist calculation debate" of the 1920s and 30s. But it is only a resemblance. The calculation debate was (principally) about the wisdom of centrally producing, pricing, and distributing *capital goods*. Friedman, on the other hand, is talking (principally) about public *policy*. This is a very different kind of "good"—and therein lies the weakness of the argument. For *dearth of feedback is not a function of who is providing the good, but of the nature of the good provided*. If presidents were elected to provide quality cigarettes, we'd know a good president from a bad one as surely as we know a good cigarette from a bad one. Instead, we elect them to do things like determine trade policy. Here the feedback is indeed opaque—difficult both to isolate and to interpret (consider the debate over the significance of NAFTA). But we'd get no better feedback if trade policy were set by a private corporation (as the case of the East India Company suggests).

Perhaps we should consider a different example. Take Friedman's own example of military preparedness. Would preparedness by any easier to determine if national defense were provided by a private firm?

For the sake of precision, it should be noted that the feedback problem that Friedman highlights is really a composite of two separate problems. First, there is the difficulty of determining the quality of the good or service provided (such as military preparedness); and second, there is the problem of attributing responsibility for its quality (was the policy, or something else, at fault?). But again, in both cases the information problem is a function of the nature of the good, not a function of its provider. Perhaps no better confirmation of this can be found than in the Communist experience itself. Citizens of Communist countries received thoroughly reliable feedback on the quality of their consumer goods—they *knew* the goods they were buying were shoddy—even though these goods had been produced, distributed, and priced *by the central government*. They also had no trouble determining roughly who (or what) was responsible—hence Communism is no more.

In sum, once we descend from the level of generalities into the specifics, we see that the general superiority of the feedback we re-

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ceive about private goods over that we receive about public policies has nothing to do with the identity of the provider, and everything to do with the nature of the goods provided. Thus, although there may be good reasons to privatize the provision of certain governmental services, this is not one of them.

But our discussion so far raises an interesting new question: why is it that we so often find government involved in the provision of goods about which information is poor? There may yet be constitutional consequences stemming from information feedback problems—although they may be the opposite of what Friedman suggests. If the literature on "information asymmetry" is correct, then those areas in which feedback about the quality of a good is poor are among those in which government involvement is most justified.

Consider the cautionary tale of the American silk industry. Although few remember it now, the United States had a flourishing silk industry in the nineteenth century. But then a number of American silk producers realized that they could substantially cut costs by mixing in a portion of synthetic fibers to produce a material that was indistinguishable from pure silk at the point of sale. Unfortunately, this had one little drawback from the consumer's point of view: some months after purchasing her brightly colored silk dress, a woman might pull it out of the closet and find that it had turned a muddy black. With no single producer large enough to establish brand recognition, honest producers couldn't compete against sharp practices, and the tainted silk proliferated. In the end, domestically made silk wares became so chancy that consumers stopped buying them, and the industry collapsed.[5] A simple government inspection system could have saved it. Analogous information problems in other industries lie behind most government labeling and inspection systems. In such cases, government actually provides a *solution* to information-feedback problems.

Of course, there are those who protest that, even when consumers are at an information disadvantage, government regulation is not the way to go. Private information-providers could do the job just as well. Perhaps there aren't enough Ralph Naders in the world to retrieve and disseminate information on the business practices of the myriad players in an industry such as silk production (or used-car dealers, or construction companies). But a for-profit "reputation industry" would spring up if only government would remove itself from the regulation business. Private, and *independent,* information agencies could establish reporting and monitoring systems on product

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quality and safety standards, and charge a fee for the service (taking the place of taxes).

Let's set aside the problem of how these merely private agencies can gain access to all the relevant information they need from self-protective private producers. What will keep these agencies truly independent? The public-choice literature has provided us with much theoretical argument, and some empirical evidence, that public agencies are vulnerable to capture by the industries they are supposed to regulate. Why would these hypothesized private agencies fare any better? Arguably, they would be much more vulnerable, since we have made them profit seeking, stripping them of any ethic (however weak) of public spiritedness that manifestly does pervade at least some governmental regulatory agencies (such as the EPA). Under the present system, we leave it up to vote-seeking politicians to call rogue public agencies to account—and they are only too happy to oblige, as evidenced by the perennial assaults on the IRS, and on "government bureaucracy" more generally. Of course, this is hardly a perfect system. But what would restrain rogue *private* information agencies?

The obvious reply is "competition." Rival information agencies would arise and compete for the reputation of reliability. But is competition any more effective at this level, given the feedback problems? How will the consumer judge among information providers, since reliable information about the products they claim to monitor is precisely what the consumer lacks? An inability to judge the quality of a product reproduces itself as an inability to judge someone else's judgment of the product. This means we'll need a monitor of the monitors to judge among them for us. And this metamonitor will itself be subject to all the usual pressures of agency capture and corruption, so we'll need competing monitors of monitors, and then monitors of these monitors of monitors, and so forth. Unless at some stage we are able to make an independent assessment of a monitor's likely knowledge and integrity, market solutions force us into an infinite regress. Instead of making business practice leaner (eliminating "unproductive" governmental regulators), we make it fatter, with layer upon layer of unproductive "private" regulators replacing the single layer of unproductive governmental regulators. Even more to the point, we hardly manage thereby to reduce the cognitive complexity of the decisions the consumer must make. In short, rather than problems with information feedback being a reason to remove government from the

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decision making process, it might be one of the leading reasons that it is there in the first place.

Democratic Instrumentalists vs. Instrumentalist Democrats

All told, we seem to be in a disastrous situation. If we are to have democracy, it must be an (in principle) *comprehensive* democracy, for democracy "with strictly limited powers" (Somin 1998, 446) is not democracy; it is government by whatever power it is that sets democracy's limit. Furthermore, so long as *voter control* is the objective, then, given the scale and complexity of social life today, it will have to be an *extensive* democracy, measured in terms of the number of issues with which voters will have to cope. (As we have seen, this remains true even if the electorate assigns government a small role in managing this complexity, for the issues will still be there, and the involvement of government will always be an option. In practice, however, we are likely to see pressure to *increase* the scope of government—and this not in spite of, but *because of* information feedback problems, which tend to multiply in an environment of ever more-numerous and -complicated goods.) Yet, as all agree, the more numerous the issues, the less informed the voters. And as Somin has persuasively argued, the available "information shortcuts" are not able to transform the uninformed opinions of voters into informed votes. In light of these considerations, any democrat who believes that the meaning and purpose of democracy is to secure *intelligent* voter control of public policy can only wave the white flag.

But this assumes that the point of democracy is to secure voter control of policy. It is an assumption both Somin and Friedman make. This is quite clear in the case of Somin. With Friedman, however, it might at first appear otherwise. After all, Friedman is a political instrumentalist. What matters for Friedman is the outcome, not the process, and democratic politics might generate desirable outcomes even if, as a process, it in no way secures *voter control* of these outcomes. Nevertheless, the kind of instrumentalist defense of democracy that Friedman explicitly takes up is more narrow than this, and still supposes that voters are in the business of controlling politicians and, through them, controlling policy.

Friedman (1998, 399) elaborates a contrast between "democratic voluntarists" and "democratic instrumentalists." On the view of the

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democratic voluntarist, "the public is sovereign and therefore has a right to exercise its will through democratic procedures, regardless of the outcome." *Vox populi, vox Dei.* In contrast, "instrumentalists value the effects of democracy, not its embodiment of the popular will per se" (ibid., 400). They value its instrumentality towards goods "such as truth, beauty, or happiness" (ibid., 404).

The democratic instrumentalist, in other words, is confronted with the possibility that the people might be wrong. So how can the democratic instrumentalist retain his allegiance to democracy? One way—the way considered by Friedman—is for public opinion to come under the sway of good elites.

> Once one judges political systems by their instrumental efficacy in achieving [such ends], the manipulation of opinion cannot be seen as inherently bad. Manipulation may, in some cases, actually be good—if it leads the public in a good direction. (Friedman 1998, 404)

The view that voters must be brought to the correct opinions on matters of policy still supposes an understanding of democracy in which the people use democratic machinery to control the politicians who will be instituting policy. Democracy remains a matter of voter control.

There are other approaches, however, that an instrumentalist might take to defending democracy. And they are approaches that take much of the sting out of the charge of opinion manipulation. The key is to drop the assumption that the end of democratic machinery is voter control of policy. After all, a democratic political system may generate outcomes that are good, yet that are neither controlled by, nor even consciously striven for, by the electorate, and it may do this without changing anyone's mind about anything. Most of the public simply has no opinion about broad swaths of public policy, with the result that good policy may be implemented without manipulating the opinion of anyone. Most people wouldn't even know it happened. But they will enjoy its fruits no less.

Weber's Instrumentalist Case for Democracy

Weber's is not the only instrumentalist case for democracy, but it is a very powerful one, and it serves my purposes well. It shows in a par-

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ticularly striking way that one's assessment of the danger posed by the public's policy ignorance very much depends upon one's understanding of the *point* of democracy.

Weber's political writings, even more obviously than his other writings, engage the practical constitutional issues that confronted Germany in his day. My attempt will be to distill Weber's governing principles and rationales from his concrete (and evolving) proposals regarding equal suffrage, parliament, and the Reich presidency, especially as these touch upon our question of how political democracy might secure intelligent public policy—indeed, secure it better than any alternative political form—*despite* deep policy ignorance on the part of voters.

Weber had no illusions about the paltry political knowledge of "the mass," as he called it. And had he believed that the introduction of political democracy would entail ceding control of public policy to this element, he would have been democracy's most uncompromising opponent, not only on account of the general policy ignorance of the masses, but also their susceptibility to "emotionalism."[7] Yet in the closing years of World War I, and for the brief remainder of his life after the war, Weber became one of Germany's leading advocates of democracy based on equal suffrage. How could this be? The answer is that Weber's commitment to democracy had nothing to do with romantic notions of "popular sovereignty." Weber was interested quite strictly in what democracy could *do*. His commitment was that of a thoroughgoing instrumentalist.

Weber provides three separate instrumentalist arguments (and a number of subsidiary arguments) in favor of extending the franchise to all adult (male) citizens. The one that comes closest to an endorsement of popular control makes a moral case for democracy on the grounds that military service has been democratized. Outraged at the "shameless reluctance of the so-called 'fighters on the home front' to fulfil the elementary obligation of decency towards the returning soldiers" by granting them equal suffrage, Weber (1994, 105–106) points out that

> all inequalities of political rights in the past ultimately derived from an economically determined inequality of military qualification which one does not find in the bureaucratised state and army. In the face of the levelling, inescapable rule of bureaucracy, which first brought the modern concept of the 'citizen of the state' into being, the ballot slip is

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> the *only* instrument of power which is at all *capable* of giving the people who are subject to bureaucratic rule a minimal right of co-determination in the affairs of the community for which they are obliged to give their lives.

Of course, a "minimal right of co-determination" falls far short of voter control. What is more, Weber does not value participation per se. Weber's real point is that universal suffrage extends a feeling of responsibility toward the nation throughout the populace.

> The legal introduction of equal suffrage . . . is . . . a demand of the Reich in the interests of national politics, for the Reich must be able to call on its citizens to fight for their own existence and honour again in the future, should this prove necessary. It is not sufficient for this purpose to have supplies of munitions and other materials and the necessary official organs; what is also needed is the nation's *inner readiness* to defend this state as *its* state. (Weber 1994, 125–26)

This is not a question of securing voter control of national policy; it is a question of securing the voter's willing sacrifice for a policy *judged by the political leadership* to be indispensable to the nation's self-preservation. Nevertheless, it is a good argument on behalf of democracy, and is supported by the fact that the first steps toward universal suffrage in continental Europe were propelled by nothing so much as the need for armies that might match the high morale and discipline of Napoleon's army of citizens.

A second argument for equal suffrage sees Weber articulating what has subsequently become familiar as the case for "countervailing powers." No system of governance can avoid the influence of money. But only systems of governance in which the ultimate currency of power is nonpecuniary and broadly distributed—as is the ballot—has any chance of escaping total dominance by the interests of financiers and bond traders (Weber 1994, 105). Again, the issue isn't one of voter control. It is a matter of giving political leaders an independent basis of support, located in the public at large, from which they may act responsibly on behalf of the public interest.

Neither of Weber's first two arguments for democracy assumes much in the way of voters' political knowledge, and either could be used to build a case that the emphasis upon such knowledge is misplaced.

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What Is the Point of Democracy?

Weber's third and most complicated argument for political democracy is also his most important and novel one. It asks that we shift our attention from the "demand" side to the "supply" side of the political process.

Weber maintains that the most general political problem to which a political system must attend is the cultivation and selection of responsible political leadership. By "responsible," Weber does not mean that a leader should be responsive to every passing passion of the voting public. It is of course indispensable that the leader maintain the *trust* of his followers, and this places restraints upon his action, including even his ability to advance their actual (as opposed to imagined) interests. But within these inevitable (and largely beneficent) constraints, the measure of a political system is its ability to recruit political leaders who, in the face of public ignorance and indifference (and even at times in the face of uninformed, or short-sighted, or low-minded popular opposition), will take responsibility for the future of the nation and (if governing a world power) for the direction of world history. Weber holds that, under modern conditions, political democracy is able to do this better than any known alternative. This is the argument I want to flesh out.

For Weber, political democracy most certainly does not entail that the work of researching and formulating public policy belongs to the voter. But it is a striking and crucial feature of Weber's case that, by and large, this task does not belong to the political leader either. Modern "government" consists of a sprawling network of separate bureaucracies, whose heads are appointed and confirmed by elected politicians to whom they must answer when called. It is these appointed officials—or rather, their subordinates—who generate all of the details, and many of the main lines, of public policy, and argue their case before their superiors. With the exception of the occasional "policy wonk," the role of political leaders is, with respect to policy formation, largely negative. They and their appointed ministers provide a few broad political directives, and beyond this act as a loosely woven sieve that holds back whatever fails to meet their political criteria.

> Under the old regime it was possible to become Prussian Minster of Culture without ever having attended an institution of higher learn-

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> ing, whereas it was only possible for a candidate to become *Vortragender Rat* [administrative subhead in the Foreign Office] on the strict condition that he had taken the prescribed examinations. The *Dezernent* [ministry division head] and *Vortragender Rat* with his professional training was of course infinitely better informed about the real technical problems in his specialist area than his chief. . . . The situation was no different in England. Consequently the official was also the more powerful figure as regards all day-to-day needs. There was nothing inherently nonsensical about this arrangement. The minister was, after all, the representative of the political power constellation, and his task was to represent its political criteria and to test the proposals of the specialist officials under him against those criteria, or to give them appropriate directives of a political kind.
>
> Things are very similar in a private economic organisation. The true 'sovereign,' the shareholders' meeting, has as little influence on the management of the business as a 'people' governed by professional officials, and those who have the decisive say in the policy of the firm, the 'board of trustees' dominated by the banks, only give economic directives and select the men who are to carry out the administration, without having the technical expertise themselves to manage the business. (Weber 1994, 326)

It is fashionable in certain circles today to denigrate "government bureaucracy." But bureaucracy is the *decisive* ingredient in effective administration. Governmental bureaucracies (like all bureaucracies) *do* tend to acquire a life of their own; but up to a point, this is precisely what we want, for they are the repositories of the local knowledge and expertise required to carry out governmental tasks efficiently and equitably. Their staff become administrative and policy specialists; and except for the top posts, which are appointed, they do their own hiring—a case of experts hiring experts, which in an epistemologically imperfect world is the best we can do. Government bureaucracy thus acquires the status of a semi-autonomous principle—in American constitutionalism, a "fourth branch" of government.

Of course, it is an imperfect system. The political leader, as the analogue of the "board of trustees," appoints administrative heads to oversee administrative and policy-generating bodies, yet is not himself a policy expert. But this is why the economic analogy is so suggestive, for no one—at least no one since Thorstein Veblen—discounts the general effectiveness of this device in the conduct of *corporate* bu-

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reaucracies. Frank Knight ([1921] 1971, 291–92) drew out the analogy with even more force:

> The first necessary step in understanding the distribution of control and responsibility in modern business is to grasp this fact: What we call "control" consists mainly of selecting some one else to do the "controlling." Business judgment is chiefly judgment of men. We know things by knowledge of men who know them and control things in the same indirect way.
>
> These statements hold good in fact for all other departments of organized social activity as well as for business. They are even more true of political organization. . . . In the field of organization, the knowledge on which what we call responsible control depends is not knowledge of situations and problems and of means for effecting changes, but is knowledge of other men's knowledge of these things.

What is important is that a political leader be a good judge, not of facts, but of people—of their integrity, their reliability, and their judgment of people and things. And judgment of people is something at which the successful politician excels because of his years of political struggle.

In a similar vein, it is quite easy for the critic of bureaucratic administration to point up the opportunities for corruption (i.e., the servicing of private interests at the expense of the public interest) that it opens up. And anyone with first-hand experience of bureaucracy in, for example, South Asia knows that, in some cultural settings, these opportunities are quite thoroughly exploited. But the history of governmental administration in the United States since civil service reform strongly argues for the superiority of this system (at least in a Western cultural setting) over either the "spoils system" or the direct election of lower-level public offices.[8] It remains to be added only that, since the greatest bulwark against corruption is the official's sense of the dignity of his office, denigration of the "bureaucrat" *tout court* is not only ignorant, but counterproductive (Weber 1994, 321–22).

But this paean to the policy expertise of the bureaucracy raises a question: If the bureaucracy is so wonderful, why we don't we just eliminate the democratic apparatus in favor of unalloyed government by bureaucratic officials? Here is where Weber drops the other shoe. He has nothing but scorn for the "swindle" of a bureaucratic admin-

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istration freed from parliamentary "meddling," under which eventually "the mass of citizens is left without freedom or rights in a bureaucratic, 'authoritarian state' which has only the appearance of parliamentary rule, and in which the citizens are 'administered' like a herd of cattle" (126–27). The usual critique of unalloyed bureaucratic rule, which Weber shares, is that, absent an independent organ of control able to demand that "the all-powerful officials give a public account of themselves," the bureaucracy would, on the one hand, assume the arrogance of unchecked power, and on the other, fall away from the public interest and into the hands of the monied interest (which would actually stifle economic competition and long-term growth, in addition to its more obvious negative consequences) (Weber 1994, 126–27, 226). But Weber's more original and decisive point is that bureaucrats are simply not up to the crucial task of providing political leadership:

> In terms of what he is really called upon to do, the true official . . . should not engage in politics but should 'administer,' and above all he should do so *impartially*. . . . The official should carry out the duties of his office *sine ira et studio*, 'without anger and prejudice.' Thus, he should not do the very thing which politicians, both the leaders and their following, always and necessarily must do, which is to *fight*. Partisanship, fighting, passion—*ira et studium*—all this is the very element in which the politician, and above all the political *leader*, thrives. *His* actions are subject to a quite different principle of *responsibility*, one diametrically opposed to that of the official. When, despite the arguments advanced by an official, his superior insists on the execution of an instruction which the official regards as mistaken, the official's honour consists in being able to carry out that instruction, on the *responsibility* of the man issuing it, conscientiously and precisely in the same way as if it corresponded to his own convictions. Without this supremely ethical discipline and self-denial the whole apparatus would disintegrate. By contrast, the honour of the political leader, that is, of the leading statesman, consists precisely in taking exclusive, *personal* responsibility for what he does, responsibility which he cannot and may not refuse or unload onto others. Precisely those who are officials by nature and who, in this regard, are of high moral stature, are bad and, particularly in the political meaning of the word, irresponsible politicians, and thus of low moral stature in this sense—men of the kind we Germans, to our cost, have had in positions of leadership time after time. This is what we call 'rule by officials'. (Weber 1994, 330–31)

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Government by bureaucrats *alone* is ineffectual because (among other reasons) the bureaucrat is constitutionally unfit for the demands of leadership. The official occupies himself with the details of policy and its implementation; the political leader takes responsibility for the consequences.

Even more broadly, the political leader takes responsibility for the general state of national life—and he does this even when, as is usually the case, he himself is in no way the responsible *agent*. This is no light burden. When things go badly, it is a burden he bears *for all of us* so that we might carry on in the aftermath of national failure and disgrace. He becomes the national scapegoat. But his responsibility has a further function. It means that he has every incentive to see to it, either directly or through trusted subordinates, that governmental affairs are being conducted with as much probity and prudence as possible. Where policy is conducted without an ultimately responsible party (whether an individual or a group), opportunism and irresponsibility flourish.

The Ends of Political Leadership

These are the benefits that accrue from the fact that responsibility redounds to the *office* of the political leader. But why should it be a democratically elected leader? One answer is that, if the leader is not removable, he has much less to fear from irresponsible conduct in his own government, and thus much less incentive to discipline errant subordinates. This may be reason enough. The other answer is rather more complicated, and has to do with what Weber takes to be the proper ends of political leadership. Here we come to the controversial bit:

> The question which stirs us as we think beyond the grave of our own generation is not the *well-being* human beings will enjoy in the future but what kind of people they will *be*, and it is this same question which underlies all work in political economy. We do not want to breed well-being in people, but rather those characteristics which we think of as constituting the human greatness and nobility of our nature. (Weber 1994, 15)

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> We do not have peace and human happiness to hand down to our descendants, but rather the *eternal struggle* to preserve and raise the quality of our national species. (Ibid.,16)

> Future generations, and particularly our own successors, would not hold the Danes, the Swiss, the Dutch or the Norwegians responsible if world power—which in the last analysis means the power to determine the character of culture in the future—were to be shared out, without a struggle, between the regulations of Russian officials on the one hand and the conventions of English-speaking 'society' on the other, with perhaps a dash of Latin *raison* thrown in. They would hold us [Germans] responsible, and quite rightly so, for we are a *Machtstaat* and can therefore, in contrast to those 'small' nations, throw our weight into the balance on this historical issue. That is why we, and not they, have the accursed duty and obligation to history and to the future to resist the inundation of the entire world by those two powers. (Ibid.,76)

Here we have Weber's infamous "cultural nationalism," set in sharp relief. Politics, for Weber, is about *struggle*—struggle within nations and between nations—not for power's sake alone (although this is a motive that will always involve itself), but for the sake of political-cultural ideals.

It is on this point that we lose the company of many present-day "rights" liberals, who hang their hats at the bar of "state neutrality." By the lights of such liberals, a properly constituted state is neutral on the question of the human good: it provides a framework of rights derived from principles of justice that themselves presuppose no substantive notion of the good.

Strong arguments have been raised in recent years against the philosophical coherence of the neutrality ideal, against its practicability, and against the notion that the ideal itself is really (culturally) neutral. But we need not settle these philosophical, ethical, and historical controversies to see the force of Weber's point, for even the defenders of "state neutrality" must grant that a regime of neutral justice is itself a form of life, and a form of life that has to be defended (and is being defended) against rivals in an intellectual and material struggle. Contemporary liberals, no less than early twentieth-century Germans, are in a fight for a political-cultural ideal, even if they don't believe it is a culture-specific ideal.

In light of these considerations, "what is crucially important is the

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fact that the only persons with the training needed for political leadership are those who have been selected in political *struggle*, because all politics is essentially struggle" (Weber 1994, 219). The political leader must know how to fight, and particularly how to "fight with words," which is the medium through which intellectual and, under modern conditions, even material resources are ultimately mobilized (ibid., 330). *This* is where political democracy has the great advantage over other mechanisms for selecting leaders, for talent in verbal struggle is exactly what political democracy selects for.[9] There can be no better evidence for this than that democratic politics is normally (and for the most part, advantageously) dominated by lawyers—for not only do the terms of their employment allow for easy passage between legal and political work, but they are professionally trained and practiced in the art of "making a case," and particularly in arguing points of justice and law (ibid.,110).

The Specter of the Demagogue

Such a political system is not without its risks. One of the most common criticisms of mass democratic politics as a means of selecting of leaders is that it grants power to the demagogue. Weber does not shy away from the charge.

> Active democratisation of the masses means that the political leader is no longer declared a candidate because a circle of notables has recognised his proven ability, and then becomes leader because he comes to the fore in parliament, but rather because he uses the means of *mass* demagogy to gain the confidence of the masses and their belief in his person, and thereby gains power. Essentially this means that the selection of the leader has shifted in the direct of *Caesarism.* Indeed every democracy has this tendency. (Weber 1994, 220–21)

But as Weber notes (220), and as we know even better after the experience of the twentieth century, modern demagoguery (in the strict, etymological sense) is a concomitant of the advent of mass propaganda technology and is used by *all* leaders—including the leaders of non-elective, single-party states—wherever the populace has become an active principle: that is, wherever life is no longer centered on the subsistence agriculture of the passively administered peasant. Demagoguery has become an indispensable tool of modern statecraft,

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and this is true regardless of the political system adopted—whether democracy, autocracy, theocracy, or plutocracy. If anything, democracy has the advantage in disciplining the temptations of misinformation, in that (in addition to the presence of a free press) the public is serenaded with *competing* demagogues, each anxious to expose the trumpery of rivals.

But by itself, this only promises us the least-rotten apple out of a rotten barrel. A more reliable bulwark against the rise of the rogue demagogue and the politics of mass contagion is a political system that winnows and disciplines the would-be leaders before they ever reach the demagogue's platform—in other words, a political system that recruits and pre-selects for ability and responsibility in its candidates for higher office.

> Rome and Paris were ruled by the 'street' at a time when Italy had the most plutocratic form of suffrage in the world and when Napoleon III governed in Paris with his sham parliament. On the contrary, *only* the orderly *leadership* of the masses by responsible politicians is at all capable of breaking *unregulated* rule by the street and leadership by chance demagogues. (Weber 1994, 125)

Note that this is a second meaning of "responsibility." It is not only the honor and burden of the political leader to take responsibility for consequences; the leader should also *act* responsibly. What makes for a responsible politician in this sense of the term? It is worth entering into Weber's thoughts on the issue, for his discussion of the ideal qualities of the political leader can provide us with a standard against which we might measure our own methods of recruiting, educating, and selecting for political leaders.

The Qualities of the Political Leader

Weber (1994, 352) writes that the political leader, even one of modest position, "holds in his hands some vital strand of historically important events. But the question . . . is which qualities will enable him to do justice to this power (however narrowly circumscribed it may actually be in any particular case), and thus to the responsibility it imposes on him." Sprinkled throughout Weber's political writings, one finds a variety of answers. But the qualities to which Weber returns again and again, and which, in his most mature and systematic reflec-

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tion on the issue, he describes as "pre-eminently decisive for a politician," are three: passion, judgment, and a sense of responsibility. And of these three, responsibility is paramount.

Passion: Not just any passion, but "the passionate commitment to a 'cause', to the god or demon who commands that cause" (Weber 1994, 353). And not just any kind of commitment—not one that blindly rushes forth—but one that takes responsibility for the cause, knowing when to back off as well as when to push ahead. The principal importance of having a cause is that it prevents leadership from turning into self-aggrandizement. "The sin against the holy spirit of his profession begins where this striving for power becomes detached from the task in hand and becomes a matter of purely personal self-intoxication instead of being placed entirely at the service of the 'cause' " (ibid., 354). In short, the political leader should live *for* politics and not simply *from* politics.[10]

One of the more surprising features of Weber's treatment of the leader's "cause" is just how catholic he is about its proper content.

> It is certainly true, and it is a fundamental fact of history . . . that the eventual outcome of political action frequently, indeed regularly, stands in a quite inadequate, even paradoxical relation to its original, intended meaning and purpose. That does not mean, however, that this meaning and purpose, service to a *cause*, can be dispensed with if action is to have any firm inner support. The *nature* of the cause the politician seeks to serve by striving for and using power is a question of faith. He can serve a national goal or the whole of humanity, or social and ethical goals, or goals which are cultural, inner-worldly or religious; he may be sustained by a strong faith in 'progress' (however this is understood), or he may coolly reject this kind of faith; he can claim to be the servant of an 'idea' or, rejecting on principle any such aspirations, he may claim to serve external goals of everyday life—but some kind of belief must always be *present*. (Weber 1994, 355)

The reader will note that, up to this point, I have glossed over the issue of the "broad political directives" that political leaders hand down to the bureaucrats under them. This is because previously, my point was that policy on the vast majority of issues, including many of those that touch most directly upon the daily lives of the populace, will fall outside the field of broad directives, giving the "experts" a relatively free hand, and policy details that fall under the general directives will also be worked out by the experts. But, it may fairly be

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asked, aren't these broad political directives the crux of the matter? Doesn't the success or failure of the political system hang on the specific directives that guide it?

Part of Weber's catholicity about this in the quoted passage comes from the fact that he is making a general sociological point. Elsewhere, he is much more specific about the general political direction Germany ought to be pursuing, given the specifics of its situation at the time. Nevertheless, it remains true that for Weber, the specific choice of general directives is (within limits) not as important as we might at first believe. The real problem confronted by Germany, and by all modern states, is how to hold the nation together under the centrifugal force of modern economic competition.[11] Common devotion to a political-cultural idea ("nationalism" in a neutral sense) is of course the leading solution to the problem, and a whole range of political ideals might adequately serve this purpose. What Weber emphasizes is that such devotion doesn't arise spontaneously. It is the *work* of the charismatic leader, "for it is not the politically passive 'mass' which gives birth to the leader; rather the political leader recruits his following and wins over the mass by 'demagogy'" (Weber 1994, 228). No romantic apotheosis of the "will of the people" will change this basic fact.

Not everyone these days shares Weber's strong allegiance to the idea of the nation-state, or believes that it will be the way of coming centuries, as it has been of recent ones. But two Weberian considerations might lead us to concur that *some* form of organized political life will continue to be indispensable to civilized human existence, and that it will probably have to be organized on a scale at least comparable to that of the nation-state. The first consideration involves recognizing that the tolerable conduct of social life requires countless small daily self-sacrifices—waiting one's turn at a four-way stop, queueing, showing courtesy to strangers, engaging in fair play, making good on promises. It is not too much to say that the foundation of civilization is good manners. And yet manners are not self-sustaining or self-justifying. It is probably fair to say that most human courtesies, certainly those of the West, began as the practical precipitate of the most abstract of cosmological premises (that we are all equally children of God, that heaven awaits the righteous) and the aphorisms that are drawn from them (that endurance in the face of suffering is a virtue, that "you can't take it with you"). But (and here is the Weberian part) as enchantment re-

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cedes from the face of the earth, such self-sacrifices begin to lose their point, and the only rationale that seems capable of maintaining them is a sense of common *earthly* purpose, some common cultural-*political* conception of the good (which of course by no means excludes the possibility that the conception of the good will be one of flourishing individuals).

The second and related consideration in support of Weber's position is that (as his own research emphasizes, and as has been confirmed a thousand times over by anthropology) the content of a person's character is not a natural given, but is the product of a socializing, acculturating environment. The only way to maintain some semblance of control over these environments, and thus of the basic contours of the kind of people the social system fashions, is to maintain coherent political communities—which, to be viable in today's world, must be on the order of national communities.[12]

If these or other considerations (such as the ever-present possibility of armed conflict) are correct, then "passionate" political leaders of politically unified territories will remain indispensable to civilized life. But to understand what keeps the leader's choice of causes within acceptable bounds, we must turn to the other two qualities of the qualified political leader.

Judgment: "Politics," Weber writes, "is an activity conducted with the head, not with other parts of the body or soul." Sound political judgment obviously requires that the political leader be well informed. As part of this, the leader ought to have the perspective that comes with cosmopolitan experience. He should be a "man of the world" (Weber 1994, 117), familiar with diverse conditions of life and with the diversity of approaches to common human problems, giving him both a comprehensive outlook and flexibility of mind. Paired with this, he should have the ability "to maintain [his] inner composure and calm while being receptive to realities" (ibid., 353).

But this immediately raises a paradox: "How are hot passion and cool judgement to be forced together in a single soul?" Weber's answer is that the politician needs "*distance* from things and people." By "distance from things," Weber means "inner" distance from the everyday struggle among economic interests (Weber 1994, 111). "It is not that [the politically qualified individual] lives in some kind of economically 'disinterested' sphere. No such thing exists. But he is not engaged in the daily struggle for the survival of his business, he is not the *organ* of such business, nor the bearer of plutocratic *class* interests, since he is removed

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from the immediate *conflict* of interests" (ibid., 112). The professional classes often have such inner distance. So do "grand rentiers" (the opposite of active business men), to which this passage refers. As Weber puts it, "'political character'" is simply cheaper for the man of means, and no amount of moralising can change this fact" (ibid., 113).

By "distance from people," Weber means of course that the politician should not be too beholden to, or overly partial toward, particular others. But more importantly, he means that the politician keeps distance from *himself*, from the temptation to turn his political activity into a means of self-aggrandizement. "Every day and every hour . . . the politician has to overcome a quite trivial, all-too-human enemy which threatens him from within: common *vanity*, the mortal enemy of all dedication to a cause and of all distance—in this case, of distance to oneself" (Weber 1994, 353). Distance brings both the objectivity required for sound judgment and the self-control required for dedication to a cause.

Responsibility: For Weber, a sense of responsibility is the decisive virtue of the worthy political leader. Again, this is not simply a question of taking responsibility after the fact, but of acting responsibly in the face of the facts. To what is the political leader actively responsible?

Our earlier discussion of the ends of political leadership prefigures Weber's answer. The political leader's ultimate responsibility, it needs to be emphasized, is not to the approval of his followers, even though approval is the precondition of his authority and may have to be tended to on nonvital issues. The political leader's ultimate responsibility is to *history*, and to a politicocultural "cause" within history (Weber 1994, 355). His dreams should be haunted by the question of "whether posterity will acknowledge *us as its forefather*" (ibid., 27). If the nation happens to be a great power, then the leader's responsibility is even greater: it is to *world* posterity, which will ask whether, when civilization teetered, the nation threw its weight into the balance or stood idly by. "The instinct for these specifically political interests," Weber underscores,

> does *not*, or at least not as a rule, dwell in the broad *masses* of the nation as they struggle with daily necessity, nor would it be fair to expect it of them. At great moments, in time of war, for example, their souls too become aware of the significance of national power. . . . It is just that in normal times this political instinct sinks below the level of consciousness amongst the masses. Then it is the specific function of the

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> leading economic and political strata to be the bearers of the nation's sense of political purpose. In fact this is the *only* political justification for their existence. (Ibid., 21)

Politics is for Weber a deeply ethical endeavor, and no less so for its being complicated by our allegiance to conflicting and irreconcilable value orientations, as well as by the inevitable involvement of extra-ethical interests. It is precisely these conflicting and irreconcilable demands upon politics that make responsibility the preeminent political virtue. There is nothing to be responsible *for* if commitment is absent. But commitment without a realistic assessment of consequences, and commitment that ignores the moral complexity and ambiguity inherent in all human endeavors, becomes *irresponsible*. As Frank Knight liked to put it, the only responsible principle is to gather as many principles as possible and to strike a compromise among them as best one may. This is the principled stance at the heart of the politics of responsibility, and it means that the cause advanced by our political "demagogue" will have squeezed out all trace of utopianism and irrationalism.[13]

In sum, the responsible political leader is a person who, in the face of public ignorance and indifference, acts out of responsibility to the future of the nation and (if governing a world power) to world history, on the basis of a dispassionate assessment of the situation, and in full cognizance of the force of rival ethical claims.

Recruiting and Selecting Responsible Leadership

Economistically minded social scientists, with their a priori methodological assumption that the individual's mental horizon never passes beyond pecuniary or other self-regarding interests, will dismiss such a leader as impossible (even though their own commitment to the calling of "science" is a glowing example of individuals orienting their lives toward nonpecuniary and in no obvious sense "self-interested" ideals). But it takes only a little reading in the genre of biography to realize that history has turned up such individuals at a surprisingly generous rate. And it takes only a little reading in comparative history to realize that, although there is an irreducible element of fortune in their emergence, it is not a random occurrence, but is facilitated or suppressed by the reigning cultural and institutional environment.

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How might such extraordinary individuals be recruited, trained, and selected for by the democratic process? The key lies in the *organization* of democracy, and in particular by the preselection of candidates by the political system.

According to Weber, the two institutions most responsible for training and vetting aspiring leaders are parliament and political parties.

> The firm organisation of the parties and above all the fact that the leader of the masses is compelled to train and prove himself in parliamentary committee work, where participation is governed by firm conventions, provides . . . a powerful guarantee that these Caesarist representatives of the masses will submit to the established legal forms of political life, and that they are not selected on a purely emotional basis, simply because of 'demagogic' qualities in the bad sense of the word. Especially under the conditions in which leaders are selected today, a strong parliament and responsible parliamentary parties, in their function as places where mass leaders are selected and have to prove themselves as statesmen, are fundamental requirements of stable politics. (Weber 1994, 230)

There is no need here to enter into the details of Weber's analysis of parties or parliament, other than to note that of course a parliament has many functions besides that of leadership selection, and that in securing responsible democratic leadership, a parliament has an important role in bridling the (by nature) demagogic leader of the nation *subsequent* to his selection.

> For, in relation to the (de facto) Caesarist representative of the masses, the existence of parliament guarantees the following things: (1) the *stability* and (2) *controlled nature* of his position of power; (3) the preservation of civil *legal safeguards* against him; (4) an ordered form of *proving*, through parliamentary work, the political abilities of the politicians who seek the trust of the masses; (5) a peaceful way of *eliminating* the Caesarist dictator when he has *lost* the trust of the masses. (Weber 1994, 222)

The State of American Democracy

How does contemporary American democracy stack up against Weber's stringent standards for leadership selection? The question naturally divides into two parts. First, what kind of candidates does

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the system select for, and second, what kind of choices does the electorate make between these candidates?

I will not attempt an answer to the second part of this question. I defer, not because I believe such judgments are hopelessly "subjective," but because an adequate answer would require a lengthy discursive analysis far beyond the limits of this essay and probably beyond the limits of my knowledge and powers, and because it would necessarily involve me in the thankless task of weighing living personalities around whom strong sentiments of either attachment or aversion still circulate. However, a few remarks are in order regarding what, according to Weber, a voter is to focus on in making his choice, and thus what kind of information is required for him to choose intelligently.

In any democracy, the electorate is finally called upon to make a selection among candidates for the highest executive and legislative offices of the land. The state of public knowledge thus cannot be wholly irrelevant to the good operation of the system. In Weber's phrase, the electorate must at least be "politically mature," with realistic notions about what is politically possible. Beyond this, however, the position of the electorate is analogous to that of the political leader himself, in that what is demanded of it is not so much to be a judge of things, but of people. That is, what is most crucial is not that the electorate be a good judge of policy, but a good judge of political character.

The behavior of candidates suggests that character is indeed the electorate's main focus. More often than not, the candidate for political leadership maintains a studied vagueness on policy proposals. He may stake out a position on a handful of salient issues and coin a few glowing phrases about the kind of place he'd like the country to be (his "cause"), but beyond this, he prefers to acquire the trust of the masses through the appeal of his personal qualities—his public "character." Nor is this unreasonable. Circumstances change, unexpected issues arise (including the highest issue of declaring war), and one wouldn't *want* a political leader to be beholden to policy programs calibrated to yesteryear. One looks instead for someone who is "my kind of man," who can be trusted to respond sensibly as situations present themselves. In an uncertain world, character eclipses policy program as the public's desideratum of qualification for political leadership. Only the underdog wishes to debate the issues, and only because the preferred means of victory have failed him.

A Weberian assessment of the American electorate would ask whether voters have focused on the *right* qualities of character in

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making their choice—qualities such as commitment to a cause, judgment, and responsibility. I will not attempt such an assessment here. However, it bears mentioning that there are, to my knowledge, no careful students of American politics who argue that over, say, the last four or five Presidential elections, the electorate has palpably made the wrong choice every time. This may not mean much. Statistically, the flip of a coin will choose the "right" candidate—the candidate with the truer commitment to a cause, judgment, and responsibility—half of the time in a two-party system. But then this only underscores that the first part of the question—candidate selection—is the more decisive. The system of candidate recruitment and selection winnows the field down to a few from out of (potentially) millions. And about this part of the question, something more substantial and dispassionate may be said.

Problems with Candidate Preselection

At least as important as the public's choice among candidates is the type of candidates that the political system makes viable. And if there is a pressing problem in American democracy, here is where it lies. Long-time observers uniformly note a general decline in recent years in the quality of the members of the legislature in terms of experience, ideas, and political skills. And the same observers agree that the general problem stems not from a slip in voters' standards, but from the type of candidates that the political system is attracting and from which the voters are expected to choose. The candidates are less politically experienced, more ideological, less able to enter into contrary points of view, and therefore less prepared to strike responsible compromises. What has happened?

A comprehensive answer would be lengthy and complex, emphasizing cultural as well as institutional factors. But for present purposes, two developments may be singled out, each related to the ability of "parliament" and the parties to recruit, educate, and select political leaders. The first is the exorbitant cost of elections for higher office. The pain of fundraising has proven a strong barrier to the recruitment of otherwise viable political leaders into the political system, and has led a number of very able legislators to drop out of it. The political system swings toward those with high fundraising capacity. In consequence, we see more and more candidates coming from the

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ranks of independently wealthy businessmen (who come prefunded), legacies (with established political names), and celebrities (with star power). Unfortunately, fundraising capacity is not the same thing as leadership capacity, and even worse, we have seen that those blessed with generous funding are anxious and able to shoot straight for higher office, overstepping the lower offices in which leadership capacity is tested and cultivated. Finally, the high cost of campaigns, coupled with limits on individual campaign contributions, require the typical member of Congress, for example, to spend a significant chunk of each working day raising funds for the next election, which greatly cuts down on the time he or she can devote to actual legislative work. The result is that there is less political talent entering the system, less involvement of parties and low-level government bodies in weeding out the politically reckless, less political experience and responsibility coming to Washington and the statehouses, and less policy experience (as opposed to fundraising experience) accumulated by politicians while they are in office.

The second development has been the weakening of the political parties. A variety of causes can be adduced for this, but I mention only the cause that was most avoidable and most easily reversible: the reform of the primary system. In the name of more direct democracy, we now have a party system in which presidential nominees are effectively determined before the nominating conventions even meet, greatly weakening the ability of party regulars to direct nominations toward individuals with proven political experience and ability, diminishing the necessity of striking a compromise within the party, and loosening collective party responsibility for a platform. Again, the net outcome is the weakening of the party's role in vetting candidates for responsible political leadership.

* * *

As Somin and Friedman see it, democracy is a political system designed to secure voter control of public policy. In this view, the public's bottomless ignorance about the most rudimentary policy questions is deeply unsettling—so unsettling that it becomes a matter of some urgency that we cure it. Unfortunately, none of the proposed cures hold out much promise of working, and the very viability of democracy seems to be in doubt.

But if Weber is right, Somin and Friedman are barking up the wrong tree. Under democracy as Weber presents it, policy is not the

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purview of the voter (who pays more attention to character). It is not even the purview of the political leader (who is occupied with attracting support for a political vision—which informs, but cannot be reduced to, policy). It is the purview of the bureaucracy, the trained specialists. Bureaucracy is an imperfect device for certain, but it seems the best of bad alternatives.

While this defuses the problem of public ignorance, it is by itself no great point in favor of democracy. The bureaucracy will more or less continue about its business *whatever* the political system grafted onto it. (It will be recalled in this connection that one of Tocqueville's central themes was that, despite the Revolution's radical break with the mentality and political system of the *ancien régime*, the story of the French administrative apparatus was a tale of continuity.)[14]

Nevertheless, for the ultimate fate of the political community, it matters very much what political system it is paired with. For it is the political system that determines the kind and quality of political leadership that will be selected, and it is political leadership that is relied upon to keep the bureaucracy roughly oriented toward the public welfare, and the public roughly oriented toward a common political-cultural ideal. And it is on this matter of selecting for political leadership that, if Weber is right, political democracy shows its superiority to all comers.

Reinterpreting democracy as a selection mechanism for political leadership has the further consequence of changing our assessment of the significance of the public's policy ignorance. In the main, what matters is not the voter's knowledge and judgment of *policy questions*, but her knowledge and judgment of a candidate's *public character*—his passion, judgment, and sense of responsibility.[15]

But at the same time, it brings to the fore other problems with contemporary American democracy—problems with the recruitment, education, and preselection of responsible political leaders. In the final analysis, the organization of our political parties and our campaign finance system may be in much more urgent need of a cure than the political intelligence of the average American voter.

NOTES

1. A revelatory treatment of the vast scope of public authority in nineteenth-century America, exploding many long-standing myths about the era's "individualism," can be found in Novak 1996.

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2. Tocqueville's brilliant analysis of the unparalleled authority of the American judiciary appears in Part I, ch. 6, "Judicial Power in the United States and its Effect on Political Society" (Tocqueville 1988).
3. For a powerful argument to this effect, see Ackerman 1991.
4. Actually, Somin (1998, 446) also notes the disparity in reliable feedback in the private and public domains, although he doesn't make it the centerpiece of his case for limiting government.
5. One may find the story of the U.S. silk industry tucked away in a series of three articles written by James Fallows for *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1993-January 1994.
6. Unless otherwise noted, all use of italics within quotations conforms to the original.
7. See, for instance, Weber 1994, 230: "The *danger* which mass democracy presents to national politics consists principally in the possibility that *emotional* elements will become predominant in politics." But, as we will see, Weber goes on to argue that the best prophylactic against the "wholly irrational" actions of the "*un*organised mass, the democracy of the street" (ibid., 231), is to institute an *organized* democracy with a parliamentary body and national political parties.
8. For further evidence and argument to this effect, see Weber 1994, 224–27.
9. As Weber (1994, 218) emphasizes, "any sober consideration of democratic selection will always involve *comparisons* with other human organisations and their system of selection." And Weber—a man who was nothing if not sober—takes up such a systematic comparison of democracy to all the other live options of his day on this point: monarchy, aristocracy, bureaucracy, occupational-group "corporatism," and the rule of the educated (ibid., 80–128). While a struggle for leadership characterizes a number of other political systems, such as single-party rule, Weber still holds democracy superior on the ground that the aspirant to democratic power "can be sure that the motives and means underlying his rise will be ruthlessly exposed in the fight against him" (ibid., 219).
10. For the distinction between politicians living from and for politics, see Weber 1994, 216. It is worth noting, however, that Weber believes that both types of politician are indispensable to parliamentary party politics.
11. For a classic and thoroughly convincing rebuttal of the opposite notion, that market societies are *held together* by the mutuality of economic interests underlying private contracts, see Durkheim 1984.
12. Regrettably, there simply isn't room here to detail the problems that would be raised by leaving "responsibility" for the socialization of children into the adult world in the hands of unorganized families bobbing about within unregulated markets.
13. For Weber's discussion of the difference between the politics of commitment and the politics of responsibility, see Weber 1994, 78–79, 357–68.
14. For a concise and incisive sketch of the historical development of the modern state, with emphasis upon the relative autonomy of state officialdom, its

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latent struggles against the absolutist aspirations of political authority, and the transformation of these struggles with the rise of parliamentary power, see Weber 1994, 322–50, especially the first eight pages.

15. Talk of "character" is much in the air these days, in light of the scandal that recently brought the president to trial in the U.S. Senate. I have avoided registering my own opinion on how the American public fared in its judgments of President Clinton's character. But considering that much of the talk about character comes from those who interpret the public's widespread opposition to impeachment as evidence that the public has lost its "sense of outrage" and its capacity to judge character, it may be appropriate to point out that neither sexual mores, nor willingness to bend the law in concealing sexual indiscretions, appear anywhere on Weber's list of politically relevant qualities of character. An ability to distinguish relevant from irrelevant aspects of character is a crucial part of sound political judgment, and on this score it is at least arguable that Weber would congratulate the American electorate for overcoming its usual overmoralization of politics

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EX9

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WHAT'S NEW WITH PSO?

The Policy Studies Organization was founded in 1971. It celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1996. Many important innovations have occurred since then:

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2. Udai Desai and Mack Shelley began jointly co-editing the quarterly ***POLICY STUDIES JOURNAL***, continuing the excellent editing of Don Hadwiger, Mel Dubnick, David Rosenbloom, Glenn Parker, and Tom Dye.
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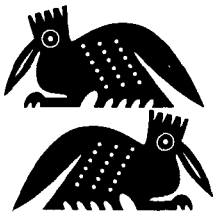

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